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WILL IS THE CAUSE OF WOE.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'ALTOGETHER WRONG,' 'WHAT MONEY CAN'T DO,' 'DACIA SINGLETON,' ETC.

"Evil is wrought by want of thought
As well as want of heart."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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WILL IS THE CAUSE OF WOE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a fresh, breezy afternoon, the white clouds floating rapidly across a blue sky, the sea leaping and dancing in the sunlight, with ships in the distance, all under full sail, taking advantage of a favourable wind to make way. It was one of those bright, cheering days we enjoy sometimes in England during the early autumn; a day that seems to brace one up, mentally and bodily; a day on which trifling troubles cannot depress, but weighty sorrow falls with a double violence from sheer contrast, as a dark cloud in the sky becomes densely black if the sun shines out on it.

It was on such a day that Miles Mason was returning home with a lighter step than usual, and whistling the only air he knew very tho-

roughly, "Rule, Britannia"; you could always tell when Miles Mason was in unusually good spirits, for he instantly went off into the sailor's national air; and so, light-hearted and hopeful, he hurried on homewards. His life had not been happy of late; a shadow had crossed the threshold of his home, but now he hoped he was about to sweep it away, to drive it for ever from his hearth, as he walked on and whistled almost merrily.

He had just left Cooper—George's father; they had been having a pipe together and a chat over it, and the two fathers opened their hearts to one another, and told their hopes and wishes; and Cooper, in ignorance of Cherry's refusal of George—for the poor fellow had confided to none, save Miles, his great disappointment—agreed with Mason it would be a good marriage for both the young people, and make both fathers happy.

"I did hear some foolish talk about your girl and the young gentleman we picked up on the rocks, but I silenced those that spoke of what they did not know; and when I told George about it he said if any dared in his hearing to say a word he would break every bone in their body; that he knew the gentleman, and had seen him, and it was a lie! So

then I thought Cherry might be proud of a young man who could speak so, for he is a brave fellow, and a good one, hard working, honest, and a good son; and a good son always makes a good husband."

"You're right there, Harry; and I'll give him my girl with trust and pleasure, and I hope she'll make him a good wife."

So the two neighbours parted, both well satisfied with the arrangement they had made, and both intending at once to communicate the news to the two principally concerned.

As Miles neared his cottage the least possible feeling of doubt took possession of him. Would Cherry, he wondered, be at all restive? —was it possible she would still refuse to marry George? His doubts were hardly framed into words; they were more like a presentiment of disappointment than actually presenting a phase of anything. Then the delicious breeze fanned his face, and with its freshness came back confidence, and he was sure all would turn out happily. Thoughts of his dead wife arose—a rare thing with him now, but not unnatural considering that he had just agreed on the most important step in life for her child. He felt, if she could look down on him, he would have nothing to fear in the

shape of reproach; she would see he had fulfilled the trust she gave him—that he had watched and tended her child as few in his class of life would have done, and he enjoyed that greatest of all blessings, self-approbation, when he scanned over the past as in connexion with Cherry. And now he was about to tell her he had promised her to one who was in every way worthy of her—that he was giving her a protector who would take his place, but who could never love her with a love passing his own. It was time to settle her—to secure her against being left alone in the world; and, though he was not an old man, he had had a hard life, and that begins to tell when you are turned fifty. He might also retire if Cherry were provided for; his pension would keep him; besides, he could add to it by odd jobs, for he was a handy man, and did not fear but that he should get as much work as he liked.

Thus, building castles in the air, humble, modest castles enough, he reached his home. The door was shut, not a usual thing on so fine a day. Perhaps Cherry was in the back room; she had, he had noticed, become very fond of that back room, and perhaps the window was open there, and she had closed the door to avoid a draught—she had not appeared over

well of late, though she had not complained; but, on trying the latch, Mason found the door locked. It struck him as strange that she should be out at that hour—it was altogether unlike her usual habits: something must have happened. Perhaps Mrs. Jackson had sent for her, or perhaps some one was taken ill, and she had gone to help. He knew where to find the key; it was an agreed thing between them if both were absent the key should be placed in a little corner close to the pump that was at the side of the house; there was a recess which the key fitted into: and so he fetched it. Wrapped around it was a piece of paper, Miles took them up together, and, crushing the paper up in his large bony hand, he opened the cottage-door.

Everything was in order; everything in its place. It looked more like a house prepared for letting—not one people were living in. There was not a crumb on the ground, not a speck of dust visible; the doors and windows were closed; the only thing that gave life to the place was the old Dutch clock, and its long, even, noisy tick went on marking the seconds and minutes as they passed. Miles closed the door and then sat down in his own arm-chair; he had to drag it forward into its

accustomed place, for it had been pushed up against the wall.

It was fully ten minutes before he had the courage to open the scrap of paper he still held crumpled up in his hand. He felt instinctively some dreadful calamity, some crushing sorrow, was about to break over him. He knew he should read it in the piece of paper he held; no wonder, then, the old Dutch clock marked ten minutes before he straightened it out sufficiently to read. There was not much in it, but the little there was, sufficed. It ran thus,—

"DEAR FATHER,—I am going away—going for ever. Don't fret about me; I am not worth your love. I should like every one to think me dead. "CHERRY."

"Dead! Aye, would to God you were!" was the bitter cry of the agonized father—a cry that told of the anguish that was rending his heart. Then he clasped his hands across his eyes, and sat so for hours, as if to shut out the horrible truth that notwithstanding would break through upon him, whether in the darkness of night or in the broad daylight of noon.

After the first burst of poignant sorrow, and the sharp, acute pain that pierced though him when he fully comprehended the fact that his child had gone, had deserted him, were dulled, he roused himself for action. What to do, where to go, what means to employ for tracing her and saving her, were the questions he had to answer to himself alone and unaided. It was night now; he knew not the time,—he had not listened to the loud hourly strike of the clock, but he knew hours must have passed since he entered his now-wretched home, full of hope and confidence. He groped his way to the mantelpiece to seek for the matches, but it was some time before he found them. In order to symmetrize everything, the match-box had been placed in the centre instead of the corner, as usual. She must have spent time in putting the place in the order it was.

The light obtained, Miles found the hand of the clock on the stroke of nine. Too late to do anything that night; perhaps so best,—it gave him time to consider what to do. So, looking into the cupboard, which was used as a larder, he took a lump of bread, and, carrying it with him into his room, he ate it whilst undressing himself; not from hunger, but from the feeling that some food was necessary.

He thought over the last few months as carefully as his memory allowed him, and he became convinced that from the night Cyril Treherne was shipwrecked and brought in nearly dead to his cottage his child had been a different being. He recollected now one or two trifling circumstances that had been inexplicable, but now were clear enough. Then there remained no doubt on his mind that Cyril Treherne was the cause of the step the deluded girl had taken. Oh, if he could but get her back without any one knowing the state of affairs! If he could but trace her, and induce her to return home!

And the poor distracted father paced up and down his little room, never closing his eyes in forgetfulness one single moment. Had Cherry seen the flickering light at the latticed window, had she heard the moans that every now and then were torn from the breaking heart of the agonized man, would she have repented and turned back?—would she have resigned the, even to her, questionable happiness of the moment, to have brought peace and calm once again to her childhood's home? It is hard to say. We are all so influenced by the human passions that they take us at times out of ourselves, carry us past being reasoned with; our

actions and words even get beyond our control. And it is something to feel supremely happy, not to care to look beyond the moment; to feel the present sufficient; and, cost what it may hereafter, it has been worth the sacrifice. Though we know it cannot last, we do not choose to think so; we revel in it whilst it is ours, and shut our senses to the results that are almost certain to ensue. Yet what is hardest is that we can rarely enjoy such moments without their occasioning agony to others, causing them pain proportionate to our pleasure. It is so frequently the case that, though heedless of it at the time, perhaps even ignorant of it, it adds to the cup of bitterness we have prepared for ourselves, and are even ready to drink as a kind of compensation.

As day dawned Miles Mason determined to lose no time in putting his projects into effect. He had made up his mind first to go to Treherne Court; it seemed to him that to trace Cyril was to trace Cherry; and at any rate if she were not—as he too surely felt convinced she was—with him, he might be induced to say where she was. He recollected hearing from John Finch, whom he had seen once or twice, that his young master was about to be married; if that were so, surely he could not

care to rob him of his child; he could spare him the ruin and disgrace that must overtake him if she were not back before another day was over.

With his head down, his face stern and hard looking, he started at six o'clock on his sad mission. It was a lovely morning, such as might have been expected by the golden setting of the previous day's sun—clear, fresh, and bright. As he walked rapidly along, with his weary load of shame and sorrow, he could not help thinking how beautiful a world it was, how great a boon would life be if trials did not mar it at every turning; and then he reproached his Creator for thus bringing him here, whether he liked it or not, and then showering down misery and woe on him—he who had ever tried to do his duty in the state of life in which he was placed; who had never wronged any one; who had been a good husband, a devoted father; who had never deceived a friend, or acted ungenerously to an enemy. And with such rebellious thoughts did he reach the gates of Treherne Court.

"What's your business, my good man?" asked the woman at the lodge, not recognizing Miles Mason's face, and thinking he did not look the sort of person that could have anything to do there at such an hour.

"I want to speak to the lady here—Mrs. Treherne."

"But you can't disturb madam at this hour; besides she never sees any one unless she first knows what he wants."

"Then I can soon let her know that," was Miles's reply, and given somewhat gruffly. He felt as if he were being suspected, thus adding insult to the injury he was smarting under. "I am no thief, nor beggar either, that needs to be stopped and questioned before entering a gentleman's house."

"No, and I did not say you were; there 's no offence meant, so you needn't be taking it all with such a high and mighty hand. Here 's my man, he 'll take any message to madam you like, and he 'll bring you the answer; and you can sit in here the while, or there in the open, if you prefer it."

Which conciliating speech at once calmed down poor Mason, whose state was such that a kind word was as likely to upset him as a rough one. He preferred the open, and sat himself down on a bench outside the lodge; his eyes wandered about a little, looking first one way and then the other. He was restless in mind and body; whilst the old gatekeeper took his message up to the house, he kept

thinking the man might have been there and back twice over; he could see the house through the dark foliage of the great beeches. People always seem to move about as if they had lead at their heels when we are expecting or anxious.

"You don't happen to see every one that comes in and out, do you?" he asked, presently, tapping his big stick on the stone pavement in a rapid, noisy manner that irritated the old woman, though she did not remark on it, as she saw there was something amiss with the man.

"Don't I, though! It would be difficult for mortal man or woman to get through them gates without my eyes seeing them, blind as they are getting, and my hearing—ah, that's sharp enough, I can tell you!"

"There's been no young girl," said Mason, after a pause, and hesitating as he spoke, "no young person that has gone through since yesterday morning?"

"Bless you, plenty on 'em! Why, they come and they go pretty well all day long."

"What, young girls?"

"Well, they're not all young, to be sure, though maybe they think they are. You see, madam is a very good lady, a very pious lady,

and does no end of good; and the admiral, dear gentleman, don't just like his lady going about very much; so she lets the people come to her when they want her, and so we get plenty, you may be certain."

"If they've all the same difficulty to get in that I have, I don't think many would trouble you, if they were of my way of thinking."

"Well, you see, you's a stranger, and a man, and it's an early hour. Madam don't let no one come before half-past ten or after twelve; and I pretty well knows the kind of people that may go up at once or not."

"Was there ne'er a one yesterday that you'd not seen afore — a pretty girl, with dark complexion and large brown eyes?"

"Maybe; but I don't much consider complexions, they're most dark, you see, hereabouts; but I don't recollect any one in particular yesterday—you said yesterday?"

Miles nodded assent.

"Because I think I did see some one about a week ago, and I recollect now I asked her what she wanted; and she came about her father, a poor blind man that lives down yonder lane. You don't mean her, do you?"

"No, no; the girl I mean wanted nothing

on her father's account," replied Mason, with a sigh.

The old woman stood thinking. She would gladly have remembered anything that could help the man; though she had no notion why he inquired, and it never occurred to her to ask. Fortunately for her and Mason too the husband returned, or she must have ended with a headache, from the way she was taxing poor old brain.

"I saw Mrs. Carpenter," he said, seemingly rather breathless, though why appeared difficult to understand, certainly not from the rapidity with which he had executed his commission. "And she went and told madam that Miles Mason, of Shelton, desired to see her; and Mrs. Carpenter came back and said madam would see Miles Mason, of Shelton, at nine o'clock." Then the old man stood and looked inquiringly at Miles. "You 're an early visitor," he said, questioningly.

"Ah, nine o'clock, and now it 's little better than half-past eight. Will you let me sit here, where I am, or shall I go and take half an hour's walk?"

"Better sit where you are. The roads are not pretty hereabouts, and ye see ye don't know your way about the grounds."

The old man did not like to say, "I don't like the looks of you, and I would rather you stayed within sight, if you don't go the other side of the gate"; but his meaning was pretty evident, and Mason understood it.

"I'll sit here, then, and smoke a pipe, if you've no objection?"

"No; the missus nor me neither have no objection."

So Miles lighted his pipe, and sat the half-hour he had to wait, puffing away; the process seemed to soothe him, but he did not speak again till it was time to go, and then he thanked the old couple for their hospitality—questionable though it was—and took the pathway that led by a short cut into the beech avenue, and made his way up to the house. He went to the front entrance—he knew of no other, and it presented itself the first. Jackson, the old butler, answered the summons, and at once used strong language at the presumption of a person in Mason's humble garb presenting himself at the visitors' entrance. He was directed to the servants' entrance, and the great heavy oak doors were closed in his face. With his teeth hard set he turned away.

"My child is good enough to be ruined, I suppose, though I am not good enough to

cross the threshold of the door of the house belonging to the man that has destroyed her."

Miles Mason's conclusion was right as the world goes. He had no right to presume to ring the visitors' bell, though he had been the means of saving the life of the only son of that house, which act was rewarded, as he believed, by his child being stolen from him—a conclusion he had no doubt arrived at without right or reason—and he felt it bitterly, aye, how bitterly none can know. He did not consider that neither the master nor mistress had aught to do with the manner in which he had been turned away; that servants are, of all people breathing, the most domineering and tyrannical, and if ever they get the chance of lording it over their fellow-servants, or those in a similar grade of life, they do so with a despotism and arbitrariness they themselves could hardly endure. Perhaps they know their class too well, and but treat them, when they have the power, as they feel conscious they deserve. But of all hard positions it must be about the hardest to serve under a master that has himself been a servant.

To go from lesser things or people to greater, it will be very much the same hard lines for the upper ten thousand when the

"people" in England gain the power they are slowly but surely acquiring by the universal education system. Like animals, ignorant of their power, they are harmless and useful; but once let them learn their strength, and they will turn and rend the master before whom they formerly crouched and served, if not at all times faithfully, still tolerably well, fear keeping them sufficiently in hand.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Treherne's curiosity was sufficiently aroused by the strange request to see her at such an hour, to make her forgive the annoyance she would otherwise have felt at being thus disturbed. Mason was ushered into the library by the identical Jackson who had so unceremoniously turned him away a few minutes previously, announcing him as,—

"This is the person, madam, who desires to speak with you."

And Jackson shut the door and disappeared.

Mrs. Treherne and Miles Mason had met once before, but only for a minute; it was on the occasion of her visit to Cherry,—he came in as she and her son were about to leave. She had her bonnet on then, and wore a veil, and Mason was in his uniform; so they looked at one another a moment for recognition. Mrs.

Treherne spoke first. Mason was standing, in a rough labourer's dress, hat in hand, by the door, feeling a mixture of timidity, anger, and sorrow that rendered him stupid looking and morose.

"I hear you wish to speak to me, Mason; it is rather an early hour for you to have sought me. But you look anxious. I hope nothing is wrong—can I help you in any way? Your daughter is not ill?"

She asked the last question suddenly, as the thought occurred to her.

"No, ma'am," said Mason, shaking his head; "not that I know of. It is a hard errand I 'm on, and when you know it, madam," he said, addressing Mrs. Treherne in the style he heard others adopt, "I think you 'll forgive the liberty I have taken in disturbing you at this hour."

"Well, what is it, Mason?"

"My child 's gone—left me!"

"Gone! Where to?"

"That 's where I want you to help me to find out."

"I? I will if I can, of course; but I know nothing about her."

"No, ma'am, perhaps not; but I think maybe there is some one in this house that does."

"Do you indeed! I will ring for Jackson, and he shall make every inquiry."

"Stop, ma'am!" exclaimed Mason, quickly, and advancing a step in his eagerness to prevent Mrs. Treherne ringing the bell, which her hand was already on. "Call no one yet, if you please; it 's not the servants that will be of much use, I am afraid."

"But, my good man, who else can know? and how can I possibly help you if I do not ask? I was not aware any one in the house was acquainted with your daughter, but it is not at all improbable."

"Madam, it 's Mr. Treherne I mean!"

"My son?"

"Yes."

"Impossible! Why, he leaves to-morrow in his yacht. I can stake my life my son knows nothing about your child!"

But, as the mother's heart spoke, a thought flashed like lightning through her brain that her life would be in some slight peril if her bet had been accepted, one or two little things that had happened the previous evening causing her some misgivings.

"He leaves to-morrow, you say?" asked Miles, eagerly. "Where is he now—can you tell me that?"

"Why, at home. Where should he be?"

"He might have been at Plymouth, or—I don't know!" And the sudden hope that had grown up died away. If he were in the house Cherry could not be with him—where could she be? "Might I see Mr. Treherne, madam?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"I will send up and ask him. Take a seat," she continued, after Jackson had been sent with a message to Cyril. "You look tired, and you must have suffered much, I am sure. When did your daughter go?"

Mason told all he knew; it was little enough: the scrap of paper was the only proof he had of anything. But he told Mrs. Treherne how he had long feared Cherry had taken notions in her head that were wrong; and then he told her of George Cooper, and what she might have been; and what he longed for now was to trace her and get her back before any one could hear anything about it. And as Mrs. Treherne listened, and gathered all together, and recollected the Snape row at Stanmore, then she too became anxious, and feared matters might be worse than she at the first blush imagined; and heartily did she promise to aid Mason in his earnest endeavours, telling him, however, that she did so out of gratitude for the help and

shelter he gave her son when he needed it, not that she thought for one second he was right in his conclusions about his being concerned in her disappearance. Whatever she thought, she would not let the man imagine she had for a moment entertained the faintest belief even in the possibility of such a thing. There was one comfort, she thought, if it turned out as she, in her heart dreaded, there would be with Mason as with her, the most anxious desire to prevent the matter getting wind. Therefore, if they only succeeded in tracing her, there would be no fear of its reaching the Thorpes' ears.

Jackson seemed a long while on his errand, but he returned at last with the answer that Mr. Treherne would be down presently; and then, as if fearing to be questioned—so at least both Mrs. Treherne and Mason imagined—he quickly retired. People are apt to be suspicious when questionable circumstances arise.

"Will you have some breakfast?" asked Mrs. Treherne, thinking that would occupy a quarter of an hour, and that she might herself go up to her son's rooms, which she somehow or another did not care to do, but still thought, all things considered, would be best.

It is as awkward almost to convict a person

as to be convicted. Mason, however, declined food; he could not eat. No wonder! with the greatest misery hanging over him that is possible to befall a man he is not likely to be troubled with hunger, though he may increase his sufferings by neglecting to take ordinary care of himself, and often increase his difficulties by becoming incapable of bodily exertion. However, this was not likely to be Mason's case; he had sense enough to know he must eat and drink, but he could not bring himself to break bread in the house of the man he believed to be his child's destroyer.

Half an hour passed, yet Cyril Treherne did not appear. It was now ten o'clock—the breakfast hour of the family; the great bell rang announcing the fact, and Mrs. Treherne felt it difficult to know what to do. The admiral was always punctual, and wished every one else to be the same; if the gong did not sound five minutes after the bell rang he made what Jackson called a rumpus. And as Jackson objected to loud talking, or indeed any mode of expressing disapprobation, he managed to bring the cook and any other servant concerned in the preparation of breakfast to the perfection of punctuality. Mrs. Treherne, therefore, told Mason she would go herself and look for her

son; and then she told him their usual habit was to meet at ten, and that she thought he had misunderstood the message she sent by Jackson.

"Servants are so stupid in delivering messages," she said. "They generally make mistakes."

So Mrs. Treherne first went in search of the admiral, who she knew would be opening his letters in the breakfast-room. She would have kept this matter from him if she could have done so, but it was impossible. She was sure he would mumble out something about d—d folly, and shock her ears with perhaps harder words still. Then the admiral had some old-fashioned notions, notwithstanding his *bonhomie* character, and in such a case as this they were likely to jar with Cyril's conduct; and though she had had no little hand in fostering what she considered the redeeming points of her otherwise irreligious, godless husband, she would just as soon now that they had not been so keen, for their very sensitiveness would cause him to see wrong where she so desired to find an excuse.

"Can't you manage to have your pauper acquaintances a little later in the day?" said the admiral, with a good-natured kind of

grumpiness, as Mrs. Treherne entered the room two minutes after the gong had been sounded.

"My dear," began madam, "it is not actually a pauper acquaintance. It is that man Mason, the coastguardsman, who, by God's mercy, saved our dear son; and his daughter has run away, admiral, and—"

"And—? Confound it! can't you go on?"

"No, my dear; if you talk in that way I cannot. You know I never can bear to hear you speak in that irreverent manner."

"Well, well, go on."

"And he thinks Cyril knows where the girl is."

"The devil he does!" and the admiral paced up and down the room twice. "Where is Cyril—in bed?" He stood still now.

"In bed! No, of course not. I sent Jackson up to him, and he sent back word he would be down presently. However, that is half an hour ago, and I have not seen him yet."

"Ugh! And supposing he knows nothing? I'll go and look for him. Confound it! I wish the man had waited till I had had my breakfast before he came looking after his daughter. People never think of others in such matters."

"I don't quite see how he was to know you breakfasted at ten. At any rate, he was here at eight o'clock."

"In that rank of life they never consider other people's comfort. They would as soon call on you in the middle of the night as at noon. You may as well look for a river without water as unselfishness in the lower class."

With which charitable sentiment the admiral left the room, returning, however, almost instantly, accompanied by Cyril, who looked as free from care and anxiety as was possible.

"All 's right there. Don't you think so, mamma?"

The admiral addressed his wife as "mamma" only on rare and wonderfully happy occasions. The truth was the admiral, knowing Cyril to be not one whit better than other young men, and having a very vivid recollection of the follies he committed in his own young days, feared the worst when he heard what was surmised, and Cyril's manner and bearing seemed to give a lie to it at once.

"What 's up?" Cyril asked, seeing something was amiss, yet not being very much overcome by it.

"Shut the door," said the admiral. "There, now hear what your mother has to tell you.

She knows more about it than I do, so I will let her speak."

"Miles Mason is here, Cyril." Cyril gave a start, and at once listened anxiously for what was to come next. "His daughter has left her home, and he thinks—he fancies you can help him to trace her."

"I! How the devil should I know where she is? I think its d—d impertinent of him to come here and say so. Where is he?"

"Wait, my dear, wait; and ple-a-se do not swear. It makes me shiver all over, just like scraping my nails down a whitewashed wall. It's an awful sensation that it produces. Don't go to him till I have spoken a few words. The man seems broken-hearted, and tells me he has suspected for some time that the girl liked you, and—"

"And what right had he to suspect anything of the kind? Supposing she did like me, is it a reason for his saying I know where she is? The fellow be—well, I won't swear, madam; all right."

"If you *do* know anything about her, and do not tell it, you will be acting like a—scoundrel, though your father says it."

The admiral spoke slowly and distinctly; and watching his son as he did so, he noticed,

not without pain, that he quailed at the word scoundrel. A strong term, Cyril thought, but he did not say so.

"Where is Mason?" asked Cyril, a dead silence having followed the admiral's speech.

"In the library," said Mrs. Treherne. "If you are going to him do not be violent, Cyril. Remember two things, my dear boy: he has a deep sorrow to contend with; and he, under God's mercy, saved your life."

"Shall I come with you, Cyril?"

"No, father; he may speak more freely to me alone."

"I am afraid the lad does know something about the matter," said the admiral, when Cyril had left the room. "Did you notice his change of countenance when I told him he was bound to tell if he knew anything of the girl?"

"Yes, I did; but we must not always judge by looks. The innocent often look guilty, and sometimes the guilty innocent."

"My experience does not agree with that at all."

When Cyril Treherne entered the library he found Mason with his face buried in his blue-coloured cotton pocket-handerchief. The man had evidently been shedding tears. He started

to his feet as he heard some one approach, and seemed confused at having been caught in what a man so rarely indulges in; though, when he does, the tears he sheds are drops of blood wrung from the heart.

Well, Mason, I am most grieved to hear from my mother that you have a serious trouble fallen on you. I did not know till a minute or two ago that you were here. I understood my mother wanted me, and, thinking it of no consequence, I did not hurry down. I am very sorry, very!"

"Mr. Treherne, sir, will you before God Almighty swear you don't know nothing about my poor girl? Will you swear, sir? Oh, the the blessing to me if you can!"

"Why, Mason, what on earth has put it into your head that I should know anything about her?"

"You know, sir, she took to you. You see you was a gentleman, and she had, so to speak, never known a gentleman before, and it turned her head like; and so it came about she gave up doing the little things at home that before she ever comed across you was her great pleasure; then she didn't eat, and often didn't sleep, for I've many a time heard her moving about her room when she ought to have been

in bed; then she seemed to like being alone; and, at last, she forgot everything! I felt sure something was wrong; and I put a watch on her to see if she ever met you, or if you came to the cottage. But,—no, sir,—I must admit that I never did find out that you had been to see her; still, I knew she thought of you. Then yesterday, Harry Cooper, the man that helped carry you up the night of the wreck, proposed that his George and my Cherry should make a match of it; and George—you know him, sir—is a good, honest lad, and I always wished he might marry Cherry. And I went home early, all joy and gladness, to tell her the good news, when I found she was gone! Gone, sir,—gone from her father and her home,—gone for ever! She is my only one, sir,—the joy of my life, my comfort, my idol! Oh, for God's sake, if you know where she is, tell me! For the love of Jesus Christ give me back my child! See, sir, if you have her, I'll forgive her—I'll forgive you; but give her back to me!" And poor Mason, with his large rough hands clasped, and the hot tears coursing down his bronzed cheek, stood in a supplicating attitude before the man who owed his life to him. "If she is not with you, still, if you know where she is, do not deny a poor

heart-broken father's prayer, but help me to get her back. You see, I 'm sure it 's for you she left me. I know it is no one else,—she cared for no one else; and if she 's not with you now, maybe she 's coming to you. Mr. Treherne, will you give me back my child,—my only one? Oh, sir, have pity on me!"

Miles covered his face and sobbed convulsively. It was a sight to soften the hardest heart, to make the most reckless and heartless sinner repent of any step that could call forth such bitter anguish.

"Mason," said Cyril, his voice shaking slightly—but the poor man whom he addressed did not notice it—and his face as white as the handkerchief he held in his hand, "I am deeply grieved for you, and I will do my utmost to help you recover your daughter. I give you my word of honour as a gentleman she is not with me, nor has she been to me, nor is she likely to come. I was to have sailed to-morrow, but I will put off my departure till the following day if I hear nothing of her to-day. I may perhaps find her, as I did hear of some one answering her description being on the sand-hills, a mile or two from this, and I will find the man who told me, and then I will let you know the result immediately."

The intense grief to which the coastguardsman had given way touched Cyril on the right chord, and he determined to do his utmost to give back Cherry to her father.

"But, if inquiries have to be made, it will be known, sir?"

"No, it need not. At any rate, we will keep it as quiet as possible. I wish John Finch was free. He would be the man to be of use now; but he's down on board the Wilhelmina."

"I can do what he could, sir."

"I meant more in taking a message to you; one can depend on John,—he never talks. However, I will do my best, and you shall hear in the morning, if not before."

"I shall be on duty to-morrow morning, sir, and I must be off now as soon as I can; but I shall e at home after twelve, and be there till two."

"Well, then, you shall hear from me between twelve and two to-morrow."

"And I may trust you, sir? You're not deceiving me?"

"Do I talk as if I were?"

"No, sir, no, and I beg your pardon; but you must remember what I'm suffering. Mr. Treherne, I could have laid my child in her coffin, and followed her to the grave, and not

have felt the sorrow I do at this moment; for there 's disgrace along with it now, and there would have been none then!"

"But there is no hope in death; it closes up all chances."

"Aye, sir, true; but where 's the hope in shame? Won't it remain on her and with her through all her life, branded on her forehead with the stamp conscience always prints? Don't you think, sir, she will be pointed at by her companions? Don't you think she will suffer to her dying day with remorse—"

"Stop, Mason; you have no right thus to condemn your daughter till you know she has done wrong."

"Would she have left me but for that? Does she not herself say she has ceased to be worthy of my love? Oh, great God! had she died, I could have wept for her with a great grief, but I should not have feared to hear her name mentioned! See, sir, people are hard in little villages like ours. Faults are not lightly passed over,—every one talks of them; and it were better for any one who has done a wrong never to return at all if it be known. I know what will be, but—sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof: let me first get my child; then I must think what to do with her.

Then I may depend on you, sir; and may God prosper your endeavours. Good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye, Mason; and I hope and trust you may have good news to-morrow."

Cyril held his hand out, but the coastguardsman either would not or did not see it, and he passed out without taking it. Perhaps there was some lingering feeling still lurking within him that Mr. Treherne knew more than he admitted; however that may be, he walked home in a more tranquil spirit than that with which he left it in the early morning, and he grew calmer still as he neared the cottage, for he recalled every word Cyril Treherne had spoken. There had been a ring of truth in them that made him doubt his having instigated his child to the step she had taken; and, if that was correctly judged, there was still hope of her safety; and though it was bitter to reflect on the want of heart and ingratitude which such a line of conduct as she had pursued proved, though "ingratitude," as our great poet says, is "a marble-hearted fiend, more hideous when shown in a child than the sea-monster," still he derived comfort from the thought that she would return to him the pure unspotted girl she left.

He invented all sorts of stories which were

to be told, should—by an unforeseen chance—Cooper, or his son George, call at the cottage; he wished to be prepared in the event of such a thing, though it was not likely. That thought brought him to Cherry's marriage with the young man. Perhaps, after what had happened, she would be submissive and give in to his wishes, and marry George, on his expressing his hopes and desires, whether her inclination led her to do so or not—never considering whether her happiness would be made or marred by such a step.

An hour and a half brought him home; and, hastily changing his clothes, he went off to his duty, first, however, going to the Coventry Arms, where he knew at that hour he was safe from meeting any acquaintances, and eating a good meal—the first food, with the exception of the lump of bread the night before, that he had tasted for four-and-twenty hours.

CHAPTER III.

When Cyril Treherne had watched Mason walking down the old avenue till he lost sight of him, he sat down on a sofa that stood beneath the large handsome bookcase between the window and door, and, with his head resting on his hands, fell into a brown study. In truth, the subject of his thoughts was dark enough to have been called black. It seemed all very drear and unpromising, full of trouble and anxiety, and certainly not through his fault. To some extent he was the victim of circumstances, and such as were difficult to explain. Yet he had not much time to waste; he was to have left on the morrow—he hoped still to do so; he might if he were able to carry out his project, the result of these meditations.

"My dear boy, are you not coming to breakfast? I saw that poor fellow, Mason, go away nearly an hour ago, and I had fresh tea made

and some kidneys broiled"—they were devilled, but Mrs. Treherne could not shape her mouth to utter the unholy word—"and some more toast; and now all that is cold. I did not like to disturb you, but I thought I had better come now just to tell you the time: it is half-past eleven—more even. Come, my dear. I will have all ready for you in five minutes."

"Thank you, mother, I will come directly."

"And Cyril dear," said Mrs. Treherne, turning back again, and laying her hand on her son's shoulder, "if I can do anything for you, be of any use to you, help you in any way, either now or when you are gone, you know, my dearest boy, I will do it. I know young men do get into difficulties sometimes, and sometimes another person—even a woman—can help them out of them; and I will do anything for you, my son. I don't ask your confidence, I don't want you to tell me your secrets, only let me be of use if I can."

For the first time, perhaps, in Cyril's life, did he really appreciate and value his mother's affection. Owing to her stern, gloomy, religious notions, a feeling had arisen in him almost amounting to dislike—not of herself, but her society; he fancied he must be horribly

bored if he happened to be thrown into her company alone. But through all his indifference—and sometimes even worse—the mother's love remained as devoted as ever. Whatever he did she thought right; or, if palpably the reverse, then she was certain he had been driven so to act by circumstances. His selfishness was excused, his extravagance was justified, his obstinacy and self-will were glossed over; so that even his father was ignorant, very often, of his faults. And now that Mrs. Treherne feared a more grave and serious danger threatening him, without knowing anything about it she proffered her aid in any shape or form in which he chose to command it. Truly few loves come up to a mother's in unselfish devotion.

"Thank you, mother!" and he took her hand with a tenderness she had never before experienced. "I may accept your offer. I must go out now as soon as I can, and I will talk to you about one or two matters on my return if you will be in your own room."

Mrs. Treherne, as she turned away to give renewed orders for a third breakfast, thought that troubles became blessings if they drew those we love nearer to us. With a foreshadowing of tribulation coming upon her—for if it fell on Cyril it fell on her—she yet felt her

heart bounding with gratitude for the demonstration of affection from her only child.

Considering that Cyril was carrying about a tolerable load of anxiety, he made a very fair breakfast. His father was in the room, seemingly reading that most wonderful of all provincial papers, the *Western Morning News*, so that no mention was made of the subject that nevertheless was uppermost in the thoughts of all three; though throughout the admiral had appeared to treat the matter with indifference, yet, whilst his eye seemed to scan the paper, his mind was full of doubt and dread. He felt —as did his wife—that Cyril was in some way mixed up in the business that had brought Miles Mason to Treherne Court; but, unlike her, he was sure it was better for him to remain silent on the subject until his son sought his advice or assistance. Hitherto the father and son had been most united; now, through a few words spoken in season, the mother had forged a link between herself and her boy stronger far than either could have imagined; a link formed out of sympathy—the surest and most enduring element for cementing the affections together. A child's suffering, be it what it may, and originating even in wrong-doing, will still claim a mother's sympathy.

Cyril's horse was at the door before he had finished his last cup of tea; he did not keep him waiting, however, but quickly swallowing what remained, and with a hasty yet kindly expressed *Au revoir*, he started off, putting his horse into a quick trot as soon as he was outside the gates. In a little more than half an hour he came to a small house, standing on a lonely road running across Praed Moor; it was known by the name of the Rising Sun, and a board, with a great yellow face surrounded by a large yellow frill, acknowledged the designation as its own. A dirty, slovenly being came shuffling out as the quick tread of the horse was brought to a standstill in front of the house, and mechanically stood at the beast's head, holding the bridle as if aware the traveller would dismount.

"Loosen the girths and curb-chain, that's all, and give him some water. I shall be starting again presently," said Treherne to the "Boots" of the Rising Sun, the name, though, being the only acquaintance he had with boots, as he always wore carpet slippers—they were easy and cheap. The man touched his hair, and led the horse away.

Cyril walked into the little parlour, where stood two round tables and one square one—

one with a couple of dirty glasses on it, and on another an old torn newspaper and an empty pewter. At the end of the room, redolent with stale tobacco, a door led into some other region; at it appeared the head of the landlady and proprietor of the establishment, her round face, with its flapping cap-frill adorning it, not unlike the sign-board without; in fact, it had occurred to more than one of her ignorant customers, who could not read, that the head outside was a portrait of their hostess, and no bad likeness either.

"Oh, sir, I am very glad you're come; will you please step in here a moment," was Mrs. Cheadle's greeting, as she saw who it was that had caused "Boots" to leave off chopping the wood that was being stored in for winter use. Mrs. Cheadle knew, too, it was a good customer she had to deal with; a customer who was likely, if things did not collapse—and it would be her business to try and prevent such a catastrophe—to bring in plenty of money to her cash-box; and Mrs. Cheadle was pushing and polite accordingly.

Cyril did as he was requested, and went into the room from which the blazing face of Mrs. Cheadle had appeared—a room as dirty and uninviting-looking as the parlour; however, he

was not in the mood to be fastidious, so he sat down on a chair, which Mrs. Cheadle swept over with her apron before offering.

"The young lady is ill, sir,—very ill! and I'm right glad you're come; for you see it's a hawkward position for me to find myself in—a poor lone widow woman, with no one to look to but myself; and then, you see, sir, it's a great hexpence, and though I'm not too proud to do anything for you, still I should like a little money in 'and, in case I 'ave to send for the doctor; and supposing—only supposing, sir,—the poor dear died, and you didn't happen to call, don't you see, sir?"

"I see, Mrs. Cheadle. It is all right; but as Miss—Miss Fox has only been with you about four-and-twenty hours, you need not have put yourself in such a fright as to what contingencies might arise; and as she is not likely to be with you many hours longer, your apprehensions may all subside."

"Not remain with me many hours longer!" exclaimed Mrs. Cheadle, in a tone of indignation; "and do you think, sir, that I would 'ave moved hall my furniture about as I 'ave, hand put myself about in the manner I did, for a customer who only remains a few hours? I never! And the dear young lady herself

told me she would remain—she did, poor dear!"

"Never mind, Mrs. Cheadle, you shall be paid for all your trouble; and now tell Miss Fox I am here."

Grumbling and mumbling to herself about its being utterly vain to be honest or hard working, that, try as she would, she never got a chance golden egg laid at the Rising Sun, whilst that betting scoundrel at the Fox and Goose get no end of swell customers, she disappeared up the stairs, leaving Cyril to his meditations—which were none of the pleasantest—till her return. She was not long absent; a few minutes only passed before Cyril heard her heavy footsteps slowly descending.

"The young lady will see you, sir, if you 'll please to go hup."

"Thank you, I know the way," said Treherne, as the fat dame prepared to ascend before him.

"Very well, sir; the first door on the right, if you please."

Stumbling up the steep, narrow stairs went Cyril; the first door on the right was ajar, so he went in, closing it after him.

"Oh, I am so thankful you are come!" said the voice of Cherry Mason; "so thank-

ful. I was beginning to be afraid I should die before you came."

"You won't die, poor little Cherry! You will be all right in a few days. I should have been here sooner, but that I was detained at home—detained by a visitor, Cherry. Some one who came to inquire about you—"

"My father!" exclaimed Cherry, starting up on the bed on which she lay. "Tell me, was it—my father?"

"It was."

"And you told him—?" she began, with her large eyes gazing at Cyril with a wild, passionate look.

"I told him nothing."

"Oh!" She seemed to breathe more freely; then after a moment, holding out her hand, which Cyril took, "And you won't tell him, dear, will you? You'll let me live and die near you; you'll not send me away from you? I don't care where I am, if I am only sure to be near you. In a garret or in a cellar, in the great town or a little place like this, with no living thing about me—I don't care, if you will come and see me sometimes."

"But, Cherry, you know I told you yesterday I must go away for some months, and you cannot remain here all that time."

"Take me with you; oh, take me with you! Listen to me," and she raised herself up as she spoke, but without loosening the grasp with which she held his hand, her face haggard and pale, her eyes looking larger and more wondering than ever, and her breath coming short and quick from the nervous excitement she was under—"listen to me. If you'll take me with you, dear, I will live in any hole of the ship you choose to put me in; I will never trouble you, never ask to see you, never even let you feel I am there, unless you wish it! I'll do everything you tell me. I'll never open my lips to a soul; but—oh, take me, take me! Do not leave me here. It will kill me if you do. I can't live away from you *now*. Had I never seen you again since I heard you speak those dreadful words—those words that fell on my ears like hot, burning coals, scorching through to the bottom of my heart—I might have lived on, or I might have died; but you found me, you prevented me dying, you put fresh life into me, you told me to live, you spoke kind words to me and said you would not leave me; then do not refuse to take me with you! I'll be your servant, I'll be your slave, but I can't live without you!"

And now, exhausted, she lay back again in

her bed; but her beautiful eyes never ceased for a moment gazing at him intently—anxiously, as if, if she lost sight of him for a moment, he might vanish.

"My poor little Cherry, you do not know how your words pain me! You ask what is impossible; you want me to do what cannot be done; and if you will think quietly and calmly you will feel it is so. And, Cherry, I saw, as I told you, yourfather to-day,—I have only just left him; he came over to ask if we knew anything about you. His grief is so great, the anguish he is enduring so intense, that I could not witness it unmoved. I could not see a man in such suffering and not promise to help him if I could; and I did promise, Cherry. I promised that—"

"Not that I should go back?" she asked, excitedly.

"I could not promise that, because it would have been admitting I knew where you were."

"Yes, to be sure, yes. I forgot that."

"But I promised to help to find you, to seek you, and if I heard of you to let him know between twelve and two to-morrow."

"But you won't?" she asked, in a pitiful tone. "Oh, I cannot, I *cannot* ever see my father again! I would rather die."

"But what is to become of you, Cherry? Listen, child, and listen calmly. It is best you should know the truth. I cannot take you with me, Cherry. I cannot, because I am bound in honour and affection to Miss Thorpe. You know—you told me—you heard us talking together the other night, and you heard that on my return we are to become man and wife; and I love her—I love her very dearly, and I cannot risk her happiness by taking so mad a step as you propose. There is nothing, Cherry, I would not do for you, poor child, poor little girl! There, don't sob so. There, there, I love you, too, you know, Cherry; I love you very much. There, don't cry, little one, don't."

And Cyril kissed the girl's head, and raised her face, which she had buried in the pillow; and, laying it on his arm, he soothed and caressed her till she almost forgot the cruel words that had pierced her heart with such bitter pain, and she basked again in a few blissful moments that were to be but fleeting and transient, as the fitful gleam of the winter's sun amidst a dark and lowering sky, laden with gloomy clouds that must fall, and from which there is no escape.

Cyril hardly knew what to do. Time was

passing, yet he had not advanced a step, and he felt almost incapable of forcing the girl to return home against her will.

"If you will go back to Shelton at once, Cherry, your father will receive you kindly, and never reproach you with having left his home, and no one need know anything about it; but if you remain away longer it must become known, and then think of the misery your poor father will suffer." He paused a moment to see if she replied, but as she did not attempt to do so, he continued, "You will not refuse, for your father's sake; and I will come and see you as soon as I return. So after all, Cherry," said Cyril, in a consoling tone, "you will not be worse off than Miss Thorpe: I have to leave her."

"Ah, but she is to be your wife!" cried Cherry, in an excited voice, her eyes flashing and her breast heaving.

"Well, I cannot marry both of you," he said, trying to speak in a lighter tone; "so what's to be done, Cherry?"

"I don't know," she replied, plaintively.

Nor indeed did Cyril, and he might have gone on trying to persuade her to take the only step left open to her till the next day, if they had not been disturbed by disputing voices

below, in which that of "Boots" took a prominent part.

"Then I tell ye ye shan't! It 's Master Tre-erne's 'oss, and no man's shall turn hissen's out!"

"I was in hopes that fellow did not know my name," cried Cyril, vexed on hearing the man's remark, and going to the window to see to whom it was he was speaking; but there was no one visible. Then, turning to Cherry, he said, "Indeed you must make up your mind what to do. You are making me very unhappy by being so obstinate, and putting it out of my power to help you if you persist in refusing to return home. I must leave you, and what is to become of you?" Cyril stood before her as he spoke. "What is to become of you if you will not do the only thing that seems to me open to you? You cannot stay here—you would soon be discovered if you did; then where will you go—where would you wish to go?"

"If I am not with you, I don't care where!" she replied, in a broken, sobbing voice.

"Then, dear Cherry, be advised by me—at any rate it will please me, and you say you love me; well if—"

"Ah, love you!—my God, how I love you! Death, and hell to follow, would be paradise to

me if I had not to leave you till this life was ended!"

"Hush, child, don't talk so," said Cyril. "I am a worthless fellow to love; you must try and forget me, and then perhaps you will take pity on poor George—that big fellow that I behaved very badly to one day."

"Cyril Treherne," cried the young girl, looking straight at him, clasping her locket in one hand, and with the other pushing the thick black hair from her forehead. "Never mention George's name to me! Whether, when we part—as you say we must—I ever see you again or not is in God's hands; but not any living soul will ever be to me what you are, whether I live long or die soon. You hurt me—hurt me as if you struck me hard when you speak like that."

"I did not mean to pain you, little one. But we will not talk on the subject any more; let us turn to the one that must be settled. You will then, for me—for love of me—for my sake—return to your father?"

Cyril threw down his last trump card. He knew if he failed now the game was lost. He stood watching the nervous twitchings of her poor sorrow-stricken face, so different from the

bright, beautiful girl of a few months back, and then with quivering lips she murmured,—

"Yes; for you I will!"

Then a load seemed removed from off Cyril's heart: he had felt that if she persisted in her refusal his difficulties would become almost insurmountable, and that he would have to pay a dear price for having been foolish enough to flatter and flirt with a simple village girl; but now there was some hope that he would escape without any very great evil arising from it. He thanked her for her concession, still holding to the only weapon he had found effectual, and making her love for him the reason why she should do what seemed to her so unacceptable. Then he told her he must leave her—that he had much to do at home, but that he would see her again later; this he said to avoid the scene he feared might arise when the moment for leave-taking arrived. She only asked him at about what hour she might expect him, never doubting he would return. He said it might possibly be late in the evening, and she was satisfied.

"God bless you, Cherry!" he said, stooping down and kissing her.

"God bless you!" she murmured, in reply.

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And then he left her,—left her, never more to see her, till—ah, well! till all was changed. Under what circumstances, how and where, this tale will in due course tell.

When Cyril passed down the ladder-stairs into the private apartment of Mrs. Cheadle, he found her in an earnest and excited conversation with no less a personage than the Reverend Samuel Snape. Cyril started, and the angry colour rose to his face as he recognized him. Snape's hat being already off, he had not the pleasure of raising it; but his hand went up to his head as if to go through that act of courtesy, becoming the humility of a Christian, though a sinner.

"Ah, Mr. Treherne!—your servant, sir. I did not expect this pleasure. I looked in here by chance to speak a word of comfort to this estimable person, and heard I could not get my poor pony sheltered because your mare occupied the only available stall. A fine creature, very fine! I stood admiring the long slope of shoulder, the broad chest, the muscular development of the upper limbs, the sinewy legs; and no windfalls, sir,—no blemishes visible to my eyes, at any rate. She's a sight to see, and a beautiful one, too!"

"You seem to understand horses; are you

a horse-dealer, may I ask?" Cyril spoke with the most perfect nonchalance.

"A horse-dealer, sir! I am a poor servant of our great Master,—a Christian minister, now in the exercise of my functions! Do I look like a horse-dealer, sir?"

The reverend gentleman, considering his calling, spoke with a little too much asperity.

"No; now I look at you I don't think you do. Were I asked to judge from your appearance what you were, I should say an undertaker."

Mr. Snape gave a start and a look full of hatred and malice, boding ill to Cyril if his reverence had the opportunity of doing him a bad turn. Cyril gave him no time to reply, supposing he had intended to do so; for, turn- to Mrs. Cheadle, he said,—

"I wish to speak to you for a moment, Mrs. Cheadle; and, as I am in a hurry, will you come into the next room? or—"

"Oh, I'm sure his reverence will step into the parlour for a few minutes. Will you, sir, kindly?"

"Oh, cer-tain-ly."

And his reverence passed into the next room and closed the door. Cyril now took Mrs.

Cheadle to the other side of the room, and spoke in an under-tone, desiring, if possible, to prevent Snape overhearing anything he said.

"Miss Fox will leave you either to-night or to-morrow; her father will come for her. If he ask you any questions, be good enough not to answer them, no matter what they are. And now, what do I owe you?"

"Well, sir, I'm sure I'm anxious to do anything I can, and I won't tell nobody nothing about anything. You see I've been put about a good deal, and got bustled, and—"

"Well, never mind all that. What is owing for the trouble you have had, and the use of the room, and whatever refreshment you have supplied?"

"As to refreshment, the poor dear has had nothing but a drop of tea since she came into the house. Would you think a pound too much, sir? You see I've had a deal of trouble; I've been terribly put about, and I'm not accustomed to invalids."

"There is double your demand," said Treherne, giving the woman a couple of sovereigns; "and if you can hold your tongue I will give you as much again when I next return. But, remember, you are to know nothing, and have

seen no one. When Miss Fox's father comes, simply show him up to her room, and do not speak a word." Cyril was about to leave the room, when he turned sharply round, and asked,—"Has that gossiping, canting Methodist ferreted anything out of you?"

"Who, sir?—Mr. Snape, sir? Law, sir! no, sir!"

And Mrs. Cheadle, with the pleasant feeling of the gold between her fingers, would have sworn the devil to be a saint rather than risk the loss of them.

"Then don't let him!" said Cyril, going.

"He shan't know no more than he's got out of me already, I'll be sworn," said Mrs. Cheadle, confidently to herself.

"Well, my good Mrs. Cheadle," said the gentleman in question, returning to his chair in the sanctum of that worthy woman, "I am glad you have got rid of that shocking young man; he is not fit to be in the society of an honest woman."

"Well, sir, you spoke pretty civilly to him for so bad a person. I wonder you didn't tell him what you thought of him; you're not so partikler when you talks to me!" cried Mrs. Cheadle, the sovereigns having raised

in her a spirit of generous defence for the donor.

"My Christian friend, I have your interest at heart, and therefore tell you the truth, though truth is not always pleasant to hear." Mr. Snape spoke in a whining, sanctimonious tone, almost as if he felt injured. "All you have told me proves how shockingly depraved and vicious that young gentleman is. I feel my blood run cold through my veins when I think of all the wickedness, the guilt of which is dragging him down fast to perdition! You haven't a little refreshment you could offer me, have you, my dear Mrs. Cheadle? I assure you I want to forget all you have said, and I can't for the life of me shake off the remembrance with an empty stomach. Just a chop and boiled potato, and a glass of your very best ale. Any little trifle of that sort will suffice; you know how little I take."

And Mrs. Cheadle, with perfect faith in every word that pharisaical Methodist uttered, would have prepared half a dozen chops for him with the same alacrity she did one, if his memory was by such a simple process to be made a blank. She hinted that it would be just as well if the whole business were forgotten, and that she hoped his reverence would not

mention having seen Mr. Treherne at the Rising Sun.

And the reverend sinner lied out with a facility his fraternity alone acquire, that "he held as sacred all he saw and heard in other people's families."

CHAPTER IV.

The winter set in early this year, and began suddenly, taking people unprepared, and showering colds and coughs about in that reckless manner to which our climate seems so partial.

The Thorpes' house was not calculated to keep out the weather either in fact or appearance. Slightly built and summery looking, it chilled one to the very bones in winter. Not all the fires made rendered it what an English home for winter habitation ought to be, the number of windows, all opening to the ground, the many glass doors, the communication of all the rooms from one into the other, letting in currents of air so that in really cold weather the place became insupportable. It was as yet only November, and not more than half of it gone by, and yet Willie went about the house with a large shawl round her, and saying she

felt so cold she thought she should never get warm again.

Willie's rosebud, Hebe face was not looking so bright as it did a month or two back. Perhaps it was the cold, perhaps the aching desire to hear from Cyril. For six weeks she had had no letter; and when she was last at Treherne—three weeks ago—they had only heard when she had. Then he was at Oporto, and was going on to Lisbon, from whence he promised to write again.

Dust and Snow were the first to feel that something was wrong with their mistress, for her attentions to them lessened, and she would sit for hours without opening her lips to either—she who was always ready to chatter any amount of nonsense to her favourites. Her appetite, too, was not good; and at last she seemed to care for little else than sitting on that old tree-stump in the hollow close beside the river, where she and Cyril had often sat together. She seemed still to enjoy listening to the leaping, rushing waters, and watching them dance and bound over rock after rock into little pools, that from their very depths were calm and still. She said the cold was less there than when walking from the drawing-room through the gallery to the dining-room.

Her father noticed the change in his child, but could gain no admission from herself that there was any, and still less that there was a cause for it. He hardly knew what to do. All confidential talk between them was over, all dependence on the one side and trust on the other seemed at an end; ordinary subjects alone were ever mooted, or, if Mr. Thorpe attempted to touch on any other, she turned him off with some chilling remark.

Major Kingsford was with them: he was often their guest, and came over from Sedgeport, remaining sometimes one, sometimes two or three days together. Philip Kingsford and William Thorpe were old college friends, Kingsford being some few years the other's junior. He was, at this period, about seven-and-thirty; a tall, square-built, soldierly-looking, plain man—a man you would not positively call ugly, he had too honest a face, looked too truthful, too upright for that; if you noticed him for anything it would be his quiet, gentlemanly manner. Wherever he went he was a favourite; he was received with a welcome at all the houses in the neighbourhood; but to none did he go with the same pleasure as he did to Yardley Wood.

Willie, from her earliest childhood, had been

his idol; he positively adored the child, and a year had rarely passed that he did not manage to cross the Channel for the pleasure of seeing her, and of keeping himself in her memory. It was a great day for him when William Thorpe and his daughter came to England to live at home for good—a day of rejoicing and exultation. He it was who welcomed them back. It was he who saw to all needful preparations in the house being carried out, so as to give it the semblance of home. And it was he who now shared William Thorpe's confidence respecting Willie's future; and though her father did not care to ask advice, he yet was biased by Major Kingsford's remarks; he would dwell on them and consider them before going contrary to what they might suggest; hence, in the all-important matter now at issue, Philip Kingsford's opinion had its weight. When he said, "Do not let her do anything in a hurry, let her have time—at eighteen the heart's feelings are not altogether to be let have their way, they often at nineteen differ, and at twenty totally change,"—her father thought he was right, and moreover hoped it.

Kingsford had arrived on a Saturday afternoon, for the pleasure of passing the Sunday at Yardley Wood. A Sunday in a town is always

disagreeable: everything and everybody seem to have gone to sleep but the church bells and public-houses, and they make sufficient noise and do sufficient work for the rest of the parish. The shops are closed, and every one is religiously cross and irritable, reading the papers or sleeping, but never doing anything profitable—always excepting the publicans; at least, so it was at Sedgeport, and so I think it is in most other places.

It was a dreary Saturday: the sky was laden with sulky clouds that threatened to come down in rain or snow; yet they kept up so long that Willie who had been waiting for the storm to break, and thinking it would be useless attempting to go out, resolved now to do so all the same, and, if it came, she could but return home. She put on her hat and wrapped a large woollen shawl around her, and was just going to pass out by the gallery window, when her father entered from the opposite side of the house by the hall door.

"Going out, Willie?" he asked, in a cheerful tone. "I think it will hail, or rain, or do something before you get far. I went to the lodge to see if Philip was coming up the road, but there was no sign of him. If I thought I should not be caught I would have the cob

saddled and go and meet him. You would not care to come, I suppose?"

"No, thank you, papa. I am only going to sit down by the river a little; if he come you will know where to find me."

"But, child, this is not weather for sitting out, and still less by the river. Come and take a walk with me."

"No, thank you, papa; I am not inclined for a walk."

And without another word she passed out, closing the glass doors after her. Her father watched her a moment, gave a deep sigh, and turned away. A weight oppressed him that he could not remove; he had not even the comfort of feeling that he knew its extent. He was glad to think his old friend was coming; he could talk to him, speak of his trouble, and hear what he said; and yet he had a conviction there was nothing to be done till Cyril Treherne returned, and then if she desired it to let the marriage take place. As to writing and telling him he might come home sooner, it would be impossible; such an idea, though it had crossed his mind, was not for an instant to be entertained. He was still standing leaning with his back against the glass doors that closed off the gallery from the hall, when he saw Philip

Kingsford's stalwart figure ascending the marble steps that led up to the front door.

He hastened forward to let him in.

"Why, how did you get here?" he asked, shaking hands more than cordially with him.

"I rode over as usual; but I thought, with this sky, purple in its threatening fury, it would be wiser to ride in at the stables and give the mare over into Mansell's care; and you see virtue is rewarded, the clouds still hold up, and I get in, as well as the beast, without a drop of rain."

"It is well virtue is rewarded sometimes," was the reply; "but it seldom falls to my lot to witness it. You read of it in story-books and 'Tales for the Young'; but it is little we see of it in real life. Are you hungry, or thirsty, or tired, Philip?"

"Not any one of the three, thank you. Where is Willie?"

"Sitting down beside the river."

"Beside the river! Good Heavens! is the child mad?"

"Very nearly so, I think."

"Why, what do you mean, Thorpe?"

"I mean what I say. I cannot understand her." They were sitting down now on one of the long crimson-covered settees that stood in the

centre of the gallery, face to face, and their arms resting on the back, looking prepared for a serious talk. "She is not exactly in bad spirits, neither is she in good; she never complains; she is always quite well, if I ask her about herself, but I see a great change. She takes little interest in all her former amusements and occupations; her two pets are pretty nearly neglected. I rarely hear the piano, I never see her draw; she rides sometimes, and reads the newspaper, and sits out on the old beech-stump near the river—you know it, it stands in a hollow; and there she is now. She has never been the same to me, in manner or in heart, since I refused to alter my determination respecting her and Treherne; yet God knows I did so for her good, and hers only—no selfish feeling biased me. If her poor mother were living, I should have had some one to share the responsibility with me; as it is I have no one, and I must be firm when I believe I am right."

There was a long pause. Kingsford's face looked anxious and thoughtful. He spoke at last.

"She is very much attached to Treherne. I hope he is worthy of her."

"Why do you say that?" asked Mr. Thorpe, quickly.

"I have heard one or two rumours lately,

and though I do not wholly believe them, I think such things seldom get afloat without some foundation. It is the source it comes from makes me sceptical as to its truth."

"What is it? You will tell me, of course—"

"Or I should not have alluded to it. There is a fellow of the name of Snapes, or Snape, who lives somewhere in or near this neighbourhood; and Thurston, a good sort of fellow, and not a gossip or mischief-maker (which, by the way, are very much the same thing),—but you have seen him—he was at Treherne when Cyril proposed for Willie,—well, he came to me and told me that this fellow Snape has been going about telling every one that Treherne abducted a young peasant girl, seduced her, and then left her in a village inn without a farthing in the world."

"Good God! can it be true?"

"No, I think not," said Philip, quietly; "though I have thought it right to give the story to you as it came to me. In the first place, you know how these things gather the oftener they are repeated: and Thurston heard it from old Delafield's son—that young puppy, Frank; and he had it from the Howards; the Howards had it from Mrs. Henderson; and, lastly, Mrs. Henderson from Snape himself.

But who told Snape I have not been able to arrive at. I have been some time trying to sift it further, but I have failed. I cannot ascertain who the girl is, or where she is now. But recollect, Thorpe, putting it at its worst, it will not be the first time such a thing has happened."

"Perhaps not. Dishonourable blackguards will exist in all ages, and I dare say the world is full of them; but it is not from among them I wish my child to find a husband. Who is this Snape? I have heard his name before: I must find him out. I will get at the truth of this business, Kingsford," continued Mr. Thorpe, clenching his fist, and striking the small table that stood near, till it shook with the force of the blow. "I have *always* had my misgivings about that young fellow; always expected, sooner or later, something would arise to shatter my poor darling's hopes. Can you conceive anything more villanous, more rascally, than acting as he is said to have done, whilst trying to win my child's affections, and after obtaining a sort of tacit consent from me that at the end of a given time she should be his? By God! I feel as if I could blow the fellow's brains out, if I could get at him."

"But, Thorpe, are you not jumping at a

conclusion?—are you not assuming, perhaps unjustly, that the man is guilty of what would be, I admit, all you think it, if true? You must not condemn him till he is heard in his own defence."

"I may misjudge him," rejoined William Thorpe, every feature in his face working with anger; "but I cannot help it. And there is that poor child fretting her life away: I am sure she is. You need not shake your head in that doubting manner. I know she is; and for what? For a scoundrel that, if half be true that is said of him, deserves to be kicked out of every respectable house!"

There was no use to reason with a man in Thorpe's frame of mind, so Kingsford wisely held his tongue, and, after a little, said he would go in search of Willie.

"You will say nothing about it to her? You will not tell her?" said her father, hastily.

"Tell her! Good Heavens, no! I could hardly, in any case, tell such a tale to a young girl. Will you come?"

"No, go without me. She would sooner have you by yourself."

"He is in a morbid state of mind," thought Philip Kingsford, as he strolled lazily down to the hollow where he was to find Willie—"in a

morbid state, and, had I known it, I would have kept my information to myself; and yet how could I do that? Should I like my oldest friend to hold from me information so important? Even if it turn out false, I surely have only done right in telling him; and if true, how much more so?"

Thus musing over the subject he came in sight of Willie. Dreary and bare as the country looked, dark and black as was now the sky, she looked like a beautiful flower amidst the desolation. Her shawl had fallen back, and showed her pretty rounded figure, set off by the neatly fitting dress; her hands were palm to palm, resting on her knees; her hat shaded her face. But he saw that her eyes were watching with a serious earnestness the rapid rushing waters as they dashed on from rock to rock, sweeping thickly over their surface till they passed on out of ken into the one great waste of water miles beyond.

She turned her head as she heard the heavy step of her old friend, and a smile lit up her face. She bent low before rising, as if to pick up something, but it was to wipe away two big tears through which she had been magnifying all around her—her own heart's disappointments and troubles as well—for the last few

minutes. She met him now with a cheerful face, her eyes looking deeply blue.

"Always welcome, dear Philip," she said, holding out her little hand, "in sunshine or in shade. We have the latter to-day, have we not? I was just wondering whether you would get here before the storm began; but I really think now it is passing us by, and carrying its dark looks away from us. I hope it will. I hate a storm!"

Willie rattled on, walking by stalwart Philip's side in a nervous and, for her, unnatural manner, as if afraid he would detect she had been giving way to gloomy thoughts, and that by thus talking she would hide it from him.

"What possesses you, Willie, to sit out in such an afternoon as this, and on that damp old stump? I think you are bewitched, to do such a thing. Surely you know it is imprudent?"

"No, I do not think so; it never hurts me."

"I should imagine you had not often tried it?"

"Well, no," she answered, smiling, "I do not know that I have."

"Inside the house, beside a good fire, Dust on the rug, and Snow on her perch, and you reading a pleasant book, is where you ought to be, and what you ought to be doing on such a day as this; instead of which, I find you as if

it were a hot July day, with your shawl off, sitting in the coldest spot in the grounds you could find. Now will you attend to me, Willie?" Willie nodded a smiling assent. "I know, all the same, you will not if it do not suit your fancy at the moment; for you are as self-willed a young lady as I ever came across. Never again during the winter season sit out of doors; as sure as you are walking by me now, you will lay yourself up if you attempt such follies in this climate."

"Well, I won't, Philip. But," she added, in a saddened tone, "it does not much matter what I do."

"Why do you say so, Willie? Are you not talking unreasonably, like a spoilt child?"

"Perhaps so; but I am right all the same."

"Right in saying it does not signify what you do?"

"Well, never mind now; we will not talk of me."

"Yes, child, but we will: we must talk of you, and try and put right what is wrong. You know, Willie, that I love you as dearly as does your own father"—the major twirled his thick moustache as he spoke, and his breast seemed to heave heavily for a moment—"and I would lay down my life to make your happi-

ness. There! do not look up so astonished, child," he continued, as Willie's blue eyes looked at him with a surprised expression. There was a strange tone in his voice—a tone of great love, yet earnest and gentle; and she was only accustomed to see Philip Kingsford a joyous, jovial, kind-hearted friend: he seemed for a moment under another mantle, and she did not then understand it. "Do not be astonished: I thought you knew as much always; and I know all the workings of your heart as if I were your father-confessor," he continued, now more in his old familiar way, "and there is no use in brooding over the inevitable. Your inevitable ends in a few months: most people's end only with their lives. So you ought to swamp the present in the future, live simply in the recollection that Treherne will be home in the spring, and then all your anxieties will cease."

"Do you think so, Philip?"

She asked him in a tone that implied she thought he spoke what he did not feel.

"Why should I not? Is there anything likely to arise that could prove me wrong? Are you changing in your own feelings, Willie?" he asked, hurriedly, and with a strange light fla ming from his honest eyes.

She shook her head slowly.

"No, not that: I shall never change."

"Then what is it, child?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"I will tell you, Philip: I have no one else to tell. I cannot tell papa,—we are not what we used to be to one another; he and I never mention the subject now. Poor papa! I am sorry for it, but it was his own doing: he does not understand me, I think; perhaps you will not either. Well, after all, it may be best so."

"Is this the way, do you think, to get rid of a trouble. Tell it me, at any rate. You know, Willie, you can trust your old friend, do you not?"

"Trust you, Philip! Dear Philip, I trust and love you too."

A thrill passed through Kingsford's heart, and for a moment the young girl's innocent words made the strong man feel as weak as a child; he quickly recovered himself, however, and said,—

"Prove it, Willie, by putting confidence in me."

"I will, then. Yet after all it is so little that, when I come to think over it, I feel half ashamed of making so much of it. You know the Hendersons; they live at Sandcombe House, about three miles from Treherne—a widow—"

"Oh yes, go on. I know well enough whom you mean."

"Well, the other day I was out riding, and we met them; they were in their little carriage, and papa was talking to Mrs. Henderson, and I to old Harriet, when suddenly she asked me if I had heard from Mr. Treherne. I said we had not heard for some weeks. 'Oh,' she said, and with such an expression! 'I fancy his present companion will prove amusement enough to him without his troubling himself about absent friends.' Philip, I felt such a tightening at my heart, and such hatred to her, that I have not been myself since. Stupid, is it not? Really it does seem silly. Now I have told you."

"Then you already see the advantage of speaking out your troubles, and not locking them up, and bringing about a state of feeling that makes you think whatever may befall you is immaterial. I think on this question at least I can ease your mind. I know the two men that went with Treherne, and neither of them, I fancy, is brilliant enough to render him indifferent to his old friends. They are good sort of fellows, but will not set the sea they are tossing on in a blaze."

"Oh! but she did not mean them, of course."

"She could mean no others, since no one else is with him."

"Then what did she mean?"

"To be vicious—to worry you. Women are too spiteful to one another."

"But I have never been bad friends with her."

"*Raison de plus:* you would have seen through it if you had; whereas I suppose she is jealous at your prospect of so speedily becoming a matron, whilst she, who might be your mother—no, couldn't she?—well, your aunt, then—is as far from it as she was twenty years ago; and she has no other way of showing her vexation."

"Then you do not believe there is anything in it?"

"I do not. And now let us go in, for positively the cold has gone through even this coat of mine; so I am sure you must be perished."

And as Philip Kingsford walked towards the house, with the little hand of Willie Thorpe resting on his arm, and thought over the pain a silly remark had caused her, his heart sank at what would be the consequence if what he had heard, and feared had some foundation, proved true.

CHAPTER V.

In a square red-brick house, named Laurel Cottage, and approached by a small green gate, resided the Reverend S. Snape. He rented two rooms only, both fronting the entrance and on the ground floor. The room to the right as you entered the narrow passage was his sitting-room; the one on the left his bed-room. His landlady, Mrs. Rosam, was a sister of Mrs. Cheadle's, and hence the source Snape derived much of his information from; though, as a rule, he required no kinship between any one for an excuse to thrust himself into the affairs of others or intrude where he was neither asked nor wanted.

Laurel Cottage was situated at the entrance to the village of Sandcombe, and about two miles from Sandcombe House on one side and three from Treherne Court on the other. The chapel of which Snape was minister was close

at hand; the bell echoed in his ear when it was rung on the Sabbath mornings.

It was Saturday afternoon, a time when Snape was always at home, for he was writing —or filching from others—his discourse for the morrow. The days were short and very cold, and so, though barely four o'clock, he was sitting with a couple of lighted candles before him and a bright, blazing fire at his back. Creature comforts were essential to this pious man, who thought it right to bear out his reputation to wear a long face and drooping mouth,—

> "Just as if our Maker,
> The God of goodness, was an undertaker";

and who certainly

> "Stole the livery of the Court of Heaven
> To serve the devil in!"

He could turn up his watery eyes, and shake his head, and clasp his fat hands; wear trousers shining at the knees and a long threadbare coat; and pray long prayers, and curse the sinner, and laud the saint, the latter, however, with such faint praise that showed how little he was able to admit of good in any—all, too, so meekly, that some were really deceived by

the outward sign, and believed in the invisible grace. He was preparing a charity sermon. It was seldom he preached without wanting something from his congregation; so that charity sermons were the rule and not the exception. It is true his congregation was not a wealthy one, the Hendersons being almost the only really well-to-do people amongst his supporters; but he managed to get money out of them at times and seasons when he knew it would be vain to make a public appeal. When in want of a little money, his choice of a subject was always the missionaries, if there was no other ostensible object to bring forward. He was now busily at work framing an account of trials and dangers some worthy men had gone through, the facts being taken from a book of travels in Japan, which Samuel Snape had bought for threepence at an old book-stall in Plymouth; it had already done its duty and turned out a profitable investment, which most of that gentleman's were. His two pet heroes had done marvellous deeds, and wrought wondrous conversions; up to this they had escaped all bodily evil, but every other evil had befallen them,—everything they possessed had been stolen from them by the very creatures to whom they were endeavouring to teach the

words of truth and life. Let us hope it is another sort of truth that is taught by missionaries, not the same as Mr. Snape was contemplating pouring into the listening ears of his congregation on the morrow. He wanted a little money, and he was taking the easiest way to get it. Surely the man who has the face to ascend the pulpit, in a house dedicated to the worship of God, with a string of lies on his tongue, must have something in him—something that, had he in his early years fallen into right hands, might have been guided into an honest and upright course, instead of one of cheating and hypocrisy. He was deep in the horrors of an awful tragedy, the victim a Christian traveller, and that in the book from which it was drawn had ended fatally, but which Snape thought would tell better on his hearers by having another result, when he was roused by the sound of a horse's footsteps; and looking up he saw a gentleman ride up to the gate and dismount; he then heard him inquire for Mrs. Rosam, who quickly presented herself, and in answer to the question if Mr. Snape resided there, and if he were at home, said that he was; but, on the visitor desiring to be shown in, she replied,—

"I daren't, sir, disturb His Reverence. He's

about his work for to-morrow; he 's a-writing of his sermon."

"Be so good as to say Mr. Thorpe requests an interview. Give my message, and leave Mr. Snapes to answer for himself."

This was spoken in an authoritative tone; and Mrs. Rosam, after looking for a moment at Mr. Thorpe, made up her mind to beard Mr. Snape in his den. She knew a gentleman when she saw one, but it was not from the number that called for her lodger that she learned to discern one. She knocked, a good, decided knock—one that was meant to be heard, that would rouse him out of the deepest study. The moment the "Come in" had been uttered, and Mrs. Rosam opened the door, before she had time to utter a word, Mr. Snape, in a drawling, whining tone loud enough to be distinctly heard outside, exclaimed,—

"Mrs. Rosam! Mrs. Rosam! will you never attend to my instructions? Why will you so often disturb me on the Sabbath eve? You know the duties I have to fulfil, and yet you let people in—any one that asks for me; you do not hesitate to interrupt me even in the very midst of my holy, my sacred occupation; and you know, too, how precious is my time!"

"Well, sir, I 'm sure I don't know what to say to the people. It 's a gentleman, sir, this time, and I didn't think you 'd like him turned away. He says I am to tell you, 'Mr. Thorpe requests an interview.' I did tell him you was busy; but I 'm thinking, sir, there 's never no pleasing you, and perhaps, sir, it might suit you—"

"There, there, my good Mrs. Rosam, you run away so with your talking. You 're a very attentive landlady, and—let the gentleman in. I forgot all about him, and he is waiting there whilst we 're chattering here."

The Reverend Snape quite changed his tone, and spoke quite familiarly and kindly to his landlady. It was not at all his desire to change his quarters. Mrs. Rosam took very good care of him, and he had instilled sufficient religion into her to prevent her pilfering from his private stores, and, unless he saw his way to something better, he was wise enough to know he had better remain where he was.

After disposing of his horse by giving him in charge to a little fellow whose head just reached the animal's nose, Mr. Thorpe entered.

"Good-day to you, sir! A cold afternoon," said Snape. "Won't you take a chair by the fire?"

The offer was politely declined, though Mr. Thorpe admitted the weather to be as stated; and, sitting near the window, where doubtless he thought he might have an eye on his horse, he began to explain the cause of his intrusion.

"I hear you know something of a young girl, in whom I—I take an interest; and I am anxious to learn all you can tell me concerning her."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but may I ask the name of the person you allude to? I know so many girls, both in and out of my district."

"Ah, to be sure!" exclaimed William Thorpe, vexed at his own stupidity and the blunder he was making; "I am afraid I have forgotten her name and—"

"Can you describe her?"

Snape knew perfectly to whom his visitor alluded, but he wished to increase his embarrassment as much as possible; it was the man's nature to delight in any kind of torture.

"Yes: young and—and pretty,"—Thorpe felt himself safe in stating that much. "She has left her home, and was, I believe, enticed away—induced to go with a gentleman—of this neighbourhood, who I understand has left her."

"You allude to Mr. Treherne, perhaps?"

"Exactly so; and the young person is called—"

"Cherry Mason?"

"Cherry Mason! Yes, I think that is the name. And where is she now?"

"We, unhappily, do not know, sir. I have tried to find her, and cannot."

"But do you mean that no one knows?"

Snape shrugged his broad fat shoulders, and, looking up to his low whitewashed ceiling, then gradually lowering his eyes till they rested on the honest open face before him, he said,—

"God knoweth all things!"

"Yes, yes, of course; we are all aware of that," replied Mr. Thorpe, in a tone of irritation, and tapping his riding-whip against his boot. "But does no one else know?"

"I do not, though I may have my suspicions."

"And what are they?"

"I do not think I am at liberty to tell you. It might be doing an injustice to another, and that would be unseemly in one whose mission it is to shelter the wrongdoer, though his duty is to point out the evil; and that through life I have endeavoured to do whenever I have met it, which has been but of too frequent occurrence."

"Do you mean," said Mr. Thorpe, not heeding anything Snape said but what actually bore on the question he was interested in, "that you imagine this girl to be with Mr. Treherne now—with him abroad, or at sea, or wherever he may be?"

"I may think so, and yet not be able to prove it; and therefore I have no right to infer such a thing."

"But why can it not be proved?"

"I did not say it *could* not; I said *I* could not prove it."

"Who, then, can?"

"Any one with ample means at command. I am but a poor servant of the Great Master, a man of scanty income; and though my wants are few and my tastes humble, I often find myself unable to do all the good I would for lack of wealth, and this case is an instance of it."

"Well, sir, money shall be forthcoming, if you think that with it we can trace this poor girl—find out where she is *now*—now, at this very moment."

As Thorpe spoke Snape's small, sharp eyes glittered, and his mouth for a passing moment wore an expression that might have betrayed him had he not instantly drawn down the

corners, giving him the sanctified look habitual to him.

"I think I could find out," he said, in a drawling, nasal tone, "with God's help and—money."

"How much, sir, do you think it will require?"

"Well, you see it will occupy my time very much, and also I shall have to hire a conveyance. I must begin by a journey—a little journey of a few hours, and then—"

"Will ten pounds do to begin with?" asked Mr. Thorpe, sharply.

"Yes, sir, yes—to begin with."

"Then there it is for you," said Thorpe, taking out his pocket-book and handing Snape a bank-note. "Now let us understand one another. I take it for granted you know who I am?" Snape bowed; there was no use in losing time by feigning ignorance. "And my object is not to blacken, but to clear Mr. Treherne of this charge that has been made against his honour. You understand, I hope?"

"Perfectly."

"And by what time do you think you will be able to obtain any information for me?"

"You must let me have till next Thursday. This is Saturday. To-morrow is not ours; it

is the Lord—a day of rest and prayer. On Monday I will begin my search, and on Thursday you shall hear from me."

William Thorpe rose. He was glad to get away out of the atmosphere that surrounded that methodistical hypocrite. There was something ignoble and insincere in the very air, and he was not sure that the means he was adopting to gain his end were not contemptible and beneath him as a gentleman when carried out through such a channel. Yet the circumstances were such that he might be forgiven if he did try a questionable course. Was not his daughter's future—his only child's happiness—at stake?

It was quite dark when the guest took his leave. The moment he was gone Snape drew down the blinds, and, stirring up the fire, stood for a few minutes with his back to it, indulging in pleasant thoughts. His hands were in his pockets, the left holding in its grasp the crisp piece of paper that owned such charms for this "religious," good man, this minister of the Gospel, whose object through life had been to get money, no matter by what means short of downright robbery.

"Ten pounds," he thought to himself, as a now unrepressed smile crossed his face, "ten

punds in a short half-hour, and more, I suppose, on Thursday, for it will not be imagined that I shall have found out everything by then. Ten pounds without having to preach for it! The fates have been propitious to me of late. I have managed to get more saved this year than I have for the last three all added together. But then that missionary business was a great stroke of luck. It brought me in a clear two hundred. I got five, and it only cost me three sending them out. And it was not so bad after all, for I might have kept three and only given two. Ah, well, it will bear its fruits. A good deed rarely goes unrewarded."

And reasoning thus, and congratulating himself on his successful career, he found the time slipping rapidly by, and he must turn at once to his pen-and-ink work and finish his sermon—the winding up being far away the most important part. But Samuel Snape—he was not christened Samuel, but adopted the name as in all ways appropriate—knew well how to get up a sensational ending. He could draw vivid pictures of hunger and thirst endured with utterly unknown fortitude; of being without raiment or shelter, and yet not a murmur would escape the parched lips: and

at such a season as it then was, cold and cheerless, such relations would fall with telling force on his hearers' ears; they would have neither time nor inclination for doubts, but would dive down willingly into their pockets and give liberally according to their means, and perhaps beyond them.

The collection was good—more than good, it was large—fifteen pounds five shillings and sevenpence were freely given in answer to the urgent appeal made on behalf of two imaginary victims of good works. The day was good; a white frost covered the whole country, making a somewhat monotonous picture, for the sky was of a palish grey, as if reflecting the white world at its feet; yet for the season of the year it was fine, which helped to secure a full congregation, and Mr. Snape reaped a rich harvest accordingly.

It was the Hendersons' habit to remain after the service was over to shake hands with their "dear Mr. Snape," and learn from him any parish gossip, or other, perhaps of more importance. They also shared with him in the interest he felt for the contents of the plate; they gave liberally themselves, and they liked to know what others had done. To-day, their first question was how much had been collected.

The answer was so satisfactory, it necessitated another shake of the hand—a congratulatory shake.

"My dear friend," whined out Mrs. Henderson, "you will meet with your reward! Oh, it is impossible but that your pure unselfish piety, your self-sacrificing devotion, will be recompensed by our Great Master, whose true and faithful servant you have ever been!"

"Ah, dear lady, we are to do right for the sake of right, and not with the hope of reward. I am but a wretched, miserable sinner, and can hope for little mercy if I depend alone on my own works; they are but feeble attempts, and unhappy failures too often; but the Precious Blood that cleanseth all may perhaps even wash me clean!"

"It must indeed be wonderful to do that; it will take a good lot of soap as well!" muttered a woman who passed sufficiently near them as they stood talking to hear what was said, and spoke herself loud enough to be heard.

Mrs. Henderson started and looked round.

"Who is that impious being?" she exclaimed.

"That is Mrs. Fryer," said Miss Harriet, "the woman who complained of Mr. Snape taking his washing from her."

"Ah, she is a true disciple of the evil one—

a hopeless object, my dear Mrs. Henderson; but do not heed her. It is such as she, that by words like those we have just heard, dropped at random, taint a whole village—profanity is so catching. She is one of the thorns in my path; but I must not complain,—no doubt I deserve them,—they are from the Tree of Trust in mankind I planted when I first began my career as a man of God—a mediator between Him and thankless humanity; a thankless office my dear friend—a thankless office! But, come, will you, into my humble abode?" he continued, drawing a long breath, which was meant for a sigh, as if in pity for himself and compassion for the misguided woman who had expressed her unasked opinion so coarsely. "I have a subject I much desire to confer on with you, and I know you and your dear daughter will not refuse me your kindly aid in a case where I think I may say your sympathies are already enlisted."

"You have but to express your wishes, but lay before us what you desire us to do, for us to exert ourselves to the utmost to do your bidding. We are but poor frail things when left to ourselves," continued Mrs. Henderson, with a moan; "so be our guide, director, and dear counsellor!"

Which office Snape was but too glad to fill. He now led the way to his house with a pompous step, making a sign to the Hendersons' coachman to follow with the carriage to Laurel Cottage. James, the devout and pious footman, with his shining knees and white cravat, obeyed the signal as well, and brought up the rear with a sanctimonious expression worthy of Snape himself. Of late days it had been a hard tussle for Mrs. Henderson between the Fourth Commandment and her own legs; at last she gave it up: the legs became impossible; and with Snape's approval—she having one day walked to the chapel, but found herself utterly incapable of walking back again, and that entailed refreshment at Laurel Cottage—she had out the pony carriage, but with only one pony; so the ponies were able to keep righteous every other Sunday; and it had its good side,—it forced the coachman to be a regular attendant; he did not, however, see the advantage, and still less appreciated it. James, on the other hand, who would have crawled to chapel rather than not go, was inwardly pleased at his mistress's feeble limbs.

They were seated, Snape and the two ladies, in the sitting-room at Laurel Cottage. There was no fire; on principle there was no fire on

Sundays till the evening; visitors often dropped in between the services, and it looked so uncomfortable, so very self-denying. He knew it would call forth the remark that he was a good man, simple-minded, because simple in his tastes—they go together—and unselfish, depriving himself of almost necessaries to enable him to give to others. The love of praise was very strong in this man's breast; to gain it he stooped to deceit and duplicity: so, likewise, was the love of money—a more dangerous defect still, for to gain it he lied to God, like Ananias and Sapphira of old, only he did it more cleverly—for he was successful, they were found out.

My dear Mrs. Henderson, you recollect some little time back my asking your assistance with respect to a young woman I thought was sliding rapidly down that slippery road that leads to hell, a road so easy and so smooth that, once started on its track, it is hard to stop the poor misguided soul. You remember? Yes, I thought so. Well, dear lady, it is for the same person I want your soothing expressions of advice, and perhaps help, again."

Both ladies were eagerly and attentively listening. There was a little wickedness, a little romance, and a great deal of scandal in

this affair, and all these women dearly love to meddle with. Mrs. Henderson would doubtless, had she been at home, have sent the innocent, immaculate daughter out of the room; but that not being feasible in Laurel Cottage, she resolved not to allow her to enter into the subject, and so she recommended her to take up a little tract that lay on the table, called 'Paths and Puddles,' and improve her mind.

"Yesterday Mr. Thorpe, of Yardley Wood," continued the spiritual pastor and master of these two ladies, "did me the honour to call and solicit my help in finding out where this poor woman is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson, in as shrill a voice as hers could be pitched at; "gone! Why she returned home, did she not? Surely you told us she was again with her father?"

"True, dear lady; but, alas, the tempter has been at work again, and I fear this time with so much subtlety that all the good seed we planted has been torn up before it had time to take root. She has gone away again, and none know where to, though it is believed—I need not name names—it is believed she has followed that miserable sinner, that lost and perjured soul, to—wherever he may be!"

"Mr. Treherne?"

"The same. Now I want to prove this—"

"That she is with him?"

"Yes; and I think you can help me by finding out from Mrs. Treherne where her son is, and where he will be, say, in a month's time from this."

"And does Mr. Thorpe desire to know all about this person because of his daughter's engagement?" asked Miss Harriet, dropping 'Paths and Puddles' on her lap.

"My dear Harriet," said her mother, "your pure mind should not be sullied with the knowledge of such infamy. Do not, my dear, ask questions that cannot concern and ought in no way to interest you."

"But, as I happen to know already as much as you do about it, there can be no great harm in asking so simple a question," persisted the young lady, looking the very pink of virtue, if not innocence.

"You see, my dear Miss Henderson, sin must exist in the world, because the devil goes about tempting the good and weak as well as the bad; but woe to those who are corrupted and tempted! But as regards your good mother's observation, I agree with it entirely; though the wrong is, *you* need not be tainted

even by the knowledge of it. Keep yourself unspotted from the world. You know who says that? Yes, yes; of course you do!"

"Do you not think," said Mrs. Henderson, after a momentary pause, "that I might learn something by going to Shelton? The poor lost young woman may have been heard of since—when were you there last?"

"I have not been for some time. I heard what I am telling you from a third party, a person who knew I took some interest in the matter, and who therefore let me know. Still, as you suggest, some news may have reached her father since this was told me. Will you go over?"

"Certainly. I will go there before going to Treherne. Dear me, what a world this is we live in!—a school where virtue and honesty is taught, but where only vice and knavery is learnt. Oh, dear Mr. Snape! when I think of the evil that surrounds us, I tremble for what may happen. None of us are safe, not even the most steadfast and unwavering. Oh, we must pray for strength to resist the evil one, or who can tell which of us may not be the first to fall into the net which is laid out so attractively for us, that to see it only is sufficient to make some rush madly into its toils."

I am not sure, if Mr. Snape had spoken out boldly the truth, but that he would have reassured Mrs. Henderson, at any rate, that no net would be spread out for her, whatever might be placed in his or Miss Henderson's path; but he judiciously thought it better to remain silent on that point, and only to undertake—at their special desire—to offer up, before they left, a prayer for all sorts and conditions of men; thus even praying for that double-dyed villain who was skimming over the dark blue Mediterranean, almost joyous, considering his flagrant, monstrous iniquity, as well as for the unsullied, spotless ladies beside him.

And so they departed, the Reverend Snape expressing many regrets that in his humble lodging he was unable to proffer anything in the shape of hospitality to his dear friends; but he was sure they would believe that if he could he would, and they must perforce accept the will for the deed. But they assured him they rarely partook of anything on the Lord's Day but cold leg of mutton and salad; and he affirmed that his repast was to consist of a couple of hard-boiled eggs, cooked, of course, on the Saturday. And so they bid one another farewell; the Hendersons, on reaching home,

to sit down to a roast turkey with sausages, and a lobster salad, to finish with a cold apple tart and cream; and their worthy guide and director, so soon as the sound of the wheels ceased, rang for his hard-boiled eggs in the shape of a beef-steak pie (the hard-boiled eggs were in it) and baked potatoes, accompanied with bottled stout and good old brown sherry.

CHAPTER VI.

When Cherry Mason returned home to her father's cottage after her wild, foolish flight, she returned with her heart crushed and a stain on her fair fame. Her father had fetched her, and had met her without a word of reproach on his lips; but his cold, hard manner, his stern, downcast looks, were worse to bear than had he cast her shame in her teeth, and told her all he thought of her. She was his flesh and blood—his daughter still; but she was no longer a blessing, but a curse. A blight had been cast over his whole life. He did not think of her; he did not dwell on the misery that was sapping away, by slow degrees, her very life-blood; he only thought of the disgrace she had brought upon him—of the one fact, and it stood out so prominently before him that it hid from his mind's eye all recollections of the past—the early childhood when, in her

cradle, a little motherless thing, she awoke with outstretched arms, and her great eyes—wondering eyes then—looking up with love and trust to him from whom she now shrank in fear; then, in the first freshness of girlhood, when he watched her with that anxious, wistful dread that some one might steal her young heart from him; he gained courage as time passed, and none seemed to take the father's place till came that terrible hour when he found, not alone that his child was weaned from him, but the great shadow of wrong had fallen on her; then all was forgotten of those happy days when that evil was unknown, of which the first false step leads down a precipice, and the end thereof is worse than death. And it was not alone his own knowledge that preyed upon the man; if he could have hidden his child's fault, he might have risen above the odium that, through her, had been attached to him: but all Shelton knew that Cherry Mason had run away with the young gentleman from Treherne Court, and had been brought back by her father after sundown, when none could see the poor, miserable face their slanderous tongues would have delighted in depicting.

Ah! it is a wretched world we live in, where all love to blow the breath of calumny on their

neighbour, be he rich or poor, high or low: it is a strange trait in human nature, yet it is one no time seems to root out, an inexplicable pleasure in publishing the disgrace of one's dearest friend, whilst good actions are buried and forgotten by those who have benefited by them. How often you hear a man say he can never forgive nor forget; how rarely that he must be for ever grateful and remember.

Cherry had always been a gentle, willing girl, happy to help her neighbours if she could; never spoke ill-naturedly, nor meddled in things in which she had no concern, yet she had never been really liked. Girls of her own age were jealous of her beauty; her striking Southern face attracted the attention of all the young men about Shelton; they called her the "pretty foreigner" and the "Spanish beauty"; and it was more than the young Devonshire girls could bear, hearing always of this Cherry Mason as being better than themselves. Then the mothers were vexed at their daughters being thought less of, and fathers were vexed at their sons all being ready to lay themselves at the feet of this one girl; and they never wearied of dinning into their ears that beauty was a very doubtful good—it faded quickly—a toy that ceased to please when its novelty

was over—a useless possession, that oftentimes leads to more sorrow than happiness.

And then, when events went to prove the truth of these trite sayings, you heard on all sides,—"I told you so!" "I knew how it would be!" "How lucky you were not taken in by that infamous character!" "A nice creature to have for a sister-in-law!" "A precious daughter-in-law she would have been for us!" —and so on, except in one household, for there grief, and so silence, reigned. No word of reproach, no taunt, had escaped the lips of any member of the Cooper family; not one had given utterance even to a censure on the terrible act that had brought such misery to more hearts than one. Henry Cooper, the father, called when he knew Miles Mason would be at home, and would say, in a tone intended to sound cheerful, that he had come to smoke a pipe with him; and he tried to talk, but it failed,—it generally ended by his sitting there for an hour in silence. Still he knew it was some comfort to the poor father: he knew Miles was glad to see him, and, after a little, he looked for his coming, and, would sometimes tell him he was later than usual. But George never came; he could not face the thought, even, of seeing Cherry, and he feared he might

do so if he went, though his father rarely saw her.

And she went and came about the little cottage more like the shadow of her former self; she moved silently in and out, trying her best to do her duty, to make her father's home comfortable. She was no more thoughtless and forgetful; she remembered every little thing with a surprising accuracy. She watched for his coming, and looked at him as he went out, her heart yearning for one kind word, one look of forgiveness, but it never came. Day after day she hoped something would happen that might soften him, till at last she gave it up, and ceased to hope and—she ceased to pray; for nothing came of all her earnest petitions that her father might forgive her. So she went on the same, but all was done now without interest and with indifference; there was no energy in her attempts to do her duty, she did it in a listless manner, as if the mere movement wearied her. Then succeeded a time when she became rebellious in her spirit, and she, in her great misery, cried out against her God's injustice in heaping such sorrow on her. "What had she done so heinous that her life was to be a torture to her? She had injured no one but herself. Was not her own lacerated

heart sufficient punishment without her home being made almost beyond her power of dwelling in it?" So she would argue at times; then came softer moments, but they did not last: her life was truly a burden to her.

The days were short and cold, and the heavy sea fogs rose as the sun set, and enveloped the little cottage where life was so weary and the hours so sad. And these fogs were a comfort to the poor girl, who had been a free prisoner ever since that dark night when she was smuggled back into the home she had deserted. They would be as a cloak to her if she chose to go out, which she longed to do. She, who so loved to roam amongst the rocks by the sea-shore only, when the sun was dancing on the rippling waters, pined now to go and listen to the roaring of the sea, to sit close and hear the waves beating against the giant rocks and dashing over and around them. Her very nature was changed.

It was a dreary night; a white mist enveloped the whole country round; but there was no wind, all was perfectly still, as Cherry stood on the threshold of her home, wrapped in her long winter cloak, and gazed out. Her eyes could not see many yards before her, yet she looked anxiously and listened eagerly for the sight or

sound of any human being. She knew her father could not be home before nine, and it was now but a little after seven, so she had nearly two hours that she might be absent without any fear; but she did not wish to come across any one in her walk—to meet any one would be terrible to her. Stealthily, therefore, she crept out, looking right and left with strained eyes, but nothing was stirring, and, closing the door, she took the key in her pocket and went with quick steps down to her old favourite haunt, where once—and it was the last time—she had gone with him who had turned the whole current of her life from its simple, peaceful course to what it was now; and, O God! what a difference that was!

Gliding rapidly along, she went straight to the spot: she could have gone blindfolded; indeed, through the mist she passed, sight was not of much avail. The sea was calm; it came in gentle ripples up along the sandy shore, and swept gently on, twining around the black rocks like a silver thread. All was hushed and still. She sat down and drew her cloak around her; it was a miserably raw, cold night, not fit for any one to go out in, still less to sit out in.

"This is like my life now," she thought; "all dark, and not even a gleam of light

penetrating through to give me hope; and how is it to end? Oh, Cyril, Cyril! why did God ever send you to cross my path? Why is He called merciful and just? Is it mercy to have thrown on me this crushing misery? Is it just that my father should be so harsh and cruel and unforgiving? What have I done? Have I sinned? I don't know! I don't recollect all that horrible time. I remember leaving home, and getting to Treherne that evening, and hearing—oh, my God! those words that cut my heart till it quivered with agony! Ah, I feel it now when I think of it—but I won't—I daren't! I feel as if something turned round in my brain when that time comes back to me. I feel as if I could do anything—mad things as I did do—as, if I think, I shall do again," she continued, with her large eyes growing wilder and her breast heaving. "If I could but never, never think! I could become idiotic, mad—anything so as to forget!"

And she sprang up and reached the very edge of the advancing waters. If it had been a stormy, tempestuous night she might have found courage to have cast herself into the roaring, foaming waves; but, though the thought rose into life, she shook her head; she could not lie down there and let those ripples wash

lightly over her, nor could she calmly walk into their midst. And yet, if she could but get rid of life! Was it not a burden to herself and a sorrow to her father? And perhaps even he would be glad were she gone; yet he had never reproached her, from the moment he brought her back; still it would be a relief to him, no doubt.

Then why was the sea not ready to receive her? Why would it roll on in that sleepy, dreamy manner, as if a baby might lie in safety in its arms? She turned away; she would go home; she would live on a little longer. At any rate, she had her life in her own keeping, and so she could lay it down, if it so pleased her, at any moment. Yes, she would go home now, and try to do her best while she yet remained with her father; and perhaps he might forgive her, and speak kindly to her once more, and then she would die less miserably—her last hours less bitter.

So with a soothed feeling she returned to the cottage. She let herself in: her father had not yet come home; she was in good time. The thick mist had penetrated her cloak, and it was wet through; even her dress had not quite escaped; but she did not heed it, it soon dried on her in the warmth of the little room. She

hung her cloak before the fire till she heard her father's footsteps; then she hastily gathered it together and threw it aside out of sight.

The man sat down, gloomy and morose as usual, to his supper, never opening his lips nor raising his eyes; and when he had finished, he pushed his plate aside, and, taking his pipe, began his usual occupation before going to bed. Cherry put the things away, and was going to her own room, as she had taken the habit to do when her day's work was done, when her father told her there was no need to be burning two candles—she could remain where she was.

"I was going to bed," she replied. "Good-night, father."

It was the first time she had ventured to wish her father good-night for many weeks. She made the attempt once again, as the opportunity presented itself of perhaps a better and kindlier state of things, but fruitlessly as before, —he made no reply, took no heed at all of her; and she went upstairs with another fresh pang at her heart. As she reached her room, she heard Henry Cooper's step. She was glad she had escaped him, and glad, too, her father had some one to keep him company. She felt very cold, and hastened into bed; but it was some

time before she could fall asleep, from the shivering fits that came over her.

She passed a restless, feverish night, getting hot and cold by turns, and she awoke in the morning feeling so ill she was incapable of moving. Fortunately, her father was likely to be absent all day; though she did not get up to give him his breakfast, he did not go to inquire the cause—he took what he found, and went off. By supper-time Cherry managed to crawl out of her bed, and do what was necessary. She waited till he came, attended on him, and then went to bed again. He never opened his lips, nor did he see the suffering his child was enduring; every bone in her body was aching; the damp the previous night had struck through her, and had pierced to the very marrow. But she bore up bravely, as a woman can do under bodily pain, though she will sink beneath mental suffering.

For many days to come did poor Cherry drag on her miserable existence in the same way—in bed whilst her father was absent, about whilst he was at home; and never a kind word nor pitiful inquiry greeted her during that time of suffering. At last she began to feel better, and nothing remained of her terrible cold but a short hacking cough, accompanied

by frequent pain in the chest, and fatigue. No one noticed or was even aware of these symptoms, for she saw no one but her father, and he seemed deaf and blind to all concerning her.

At last, one day, he came home with a change upon his stern, relentless countenance; he walked in with a lighter step and an expression that almost approached cheerfulness. Cherry, with her senses sharpened by severity and quickened sorrow, saw at once something had occurred which had given her father pleasure; and with that perception came the longing, more intensified than ever, for a reconciliation. Her great brown eyes followed him about; she watched him with an eager, impatient, restless, desire that he should speak to her; and he was evidently struggling with his pride to do so. At last, in his nervousness, he let slip a plate, and it fell to the ground, and broke in pieces. Cherry stooped at once to pick them up, the exertion or the position brought on a fit of coughing. Instantly her father told her to desist—he would gather up the broken pieces himself, he said, and he continued,—

"You 've a bad cough, Cherry; how did you get it?"

There was not much in the question, but they were the first words approaching to kindli-

ness that had reached her ear for months, and she was too weak to bear it without giving way; yet she had sufficient command over herself to reply, though her lips quivered and her voice shook, and two large tears struggled to fall from those wondering eyes,—

"I think the white fogs have been thicker this winter than usual, and have given me cold."

"And yet you have not been out in them."

Her father's voice was not harsh and abrupt, as it had been of late if necessity forced him to address his child, yet she made no answer; how could she, without admitting she had chosen the densest of fogs and the rawest night to go out in, and—sit out in? After a little he went on, twisting and twirling a corner of the table-cloth the while,—clearly he was altogether at his ease,—

"Cherry, we 've not been the best friends of late, you and I; you see—you left me, you proved you—you didn 't care an ounce of tobacco for me, and that made me feel hardened like; but you see you 're my child for all that, and somehow it hurts me like, when—I feel we don't seem to care for one another any more, for I—"

"But, father!" exclaimed the girl, her heart feeling ready to burst, "I do care for you; I love you as dearly as ever, if you will only be a little kind to me—a little less hard. I know, oh, I know well, how I have deserved all the misery I am enduring; but, father, can't you forgive me, can't you love your poor little Cherry as you used to do, before this great sorrow came upon us?" As she spoke she went up near to her father, and slid down on her knees by his side, and rested her poor weary head on his arm. "Oh, if my mother had lived, she would have forgiven me!"

"And so will I, child, so will I!" broke forth from her father in a choking voice; and he put his arms round his poor child, and took her once again to his heart. "Cherry, I think I should have died if this state of things had gone on much longer between us. You don't know what I have endured for this last three months! But it's at an end now, girl, isn't it?"

"Yes, father, I suppose so," murmured poor Cherry, thinking more of the end to all her wild, fanciful dreams than to the discord between herself and her father, bitter as that had been; the mere fact of its being at an end made it at once very secondary.

"And now, Cherry, I have something to say

to you, something to tell you—it 's good news, child, so you need not fear to hear it, you need not look so alarmed; it 's good news, and concerns you."

Cherry, however, did look alarmed, and her breath came short and quick. Good news concerning her! Surely her short life had already seen all the good, and evil too, that could befall it. Nothing worse could well happen, and in her poor bruised state she thought nothing could again give her the happiness she had experienced, fleeting though it had been.

"About me, father? what good can ever come to me?"

"Much, girl, if you will let it. Listen now, and I will tell you. I have just come from Harry Cooper's"—Cherry started, and her pale face grew paler at the name—"and I saw George; and he talked to me of that time when he first told you he cared for you and asked you to be his wife, and you refused him. Why did *you* never tell me this, girl? Don't you know that, once a child begins to have secrets from her parents, evil is sure to follow? Haven't I always told you to tell me everything? Had you told me this when it happened, had you trusted in me, much of the —the shame that has come upon us might have

been spared us! Ah, well! there's no use in crying over spilt milk; but it's hard on an honest man—and his only child too! O God! when I think of it I feel ready to leap into eternity!" And Mason clenched his two hands and set his teeth hard; he struggled to subdue the rising passion which the belief in his child's dishonour ever roused; for he wished now to redeem the past if possible, to wipe out the stain that sullied his name, and to gain his ends he must be calm and gentle with her —he knew that. He knew violence would only rouse opposition; so after a minute or two he went on,—"George told me all, told me how he loved you, how he would have worked for you and done all a man could do to make you happy; and he told me of his bitter disappointment, of the blank your refusal had made in his future,—how he cared for nothing afterwards, and that his increased wages were of no value as you were not to share them. He told me—at least, not he, but his father did—how, when you were being spoken of as of course all around spoke of you, he jumped up, and dared any man to couple a light word with your name."

"Did he? Poor George!" said Cherry, listening quietly, and not without some little

gratified vanity at her honest, awkward lover's devotion.

"Aye, he did, and more than that; more than all words could do, the lad offered deeds to prove himself true to you. Cherry, he is ready still, and more than ready—anxious to make you his wife; and you, girl, you won't refuse this time,—you won't cast from you his honest, true love?"

Miles Mason waited anxiously for his daughter's answer: it came slowly, but it came at last, and distinctly spoken.

"I cannot, father; I can never marry any one."

"Never marry! Why, it's the only thing that can cover your shame! Are you out of your mind?—do you know what you are refusing—what you are casting from you? An honest name, an honest husband, a respectable and, if you choose, a happy future! Do you mean to say No to all that? And if so, what do you look for?" Mason was getting angry, working himself up by degrees, through his own colouring of affairs. "Do you imagine you can go on leading the life you've been doing these last few months?—do you fancy you can remain shut up in this cottage for ever? And yet you can't go out *now*, as things

are; you're afraid to face your old companions, and, if you were not, they would shun you; you know they would not come near you, nor open their lips to you. Cherry, you have no choice; you must marry George Cooper."

"Oh, father, do not ask me!—I cannot!"

"Then may all the sorrow that must ensue fall on you and you alone! If you refuse this, never more will you have a chance of another deliverance from the shame that now surrounds you. Can't you see this, Cherry?—can't you see what a horrible fate yours must be if you don't get out of it? And you can now; you can, and you won't! O God, that I were myself dead! Cherry, you'll drive me to do something desperate; I feel it, I know it! I have once or twice thought I could not face those who know my shame and disgrace; and you can wipe it all away—and you won't! You could enable me to hold up my head again, and not be afraid to look a man in the face, and you won't! And yet it's you have brought all this misery upon me, and now that God Himself seemed to have interfered to lighten my load of grief, you won't!"

"Oh, father, do not speak so! Do not say such cruel things to me!" cried Cherry, after a pause.

Her father's head was resting on his hands; his face was hidden from her, so she did not see the bitter agony the strong man was trying to hide, for even a father does not like his child to see him weep; but he raised his head to retort, and then she saw the great tears on his hard furrowed cheek.

"Cruel are they, Cherry? But true, girl,—too, too true! Oh, that you had gone to your grave with your poor mother! I should have mourned for two instead of one; but I could have borne *that* better than *this!*"

Again another pause, and then Cherry spoke, but her voice was hardly above a whisper.

"Father, I'll do as you wish. I'll give you no more trouble. Will you then forgive me, dear father? Will you kiss me again as you did in the old times, and say in your old tone, 'God bless thee, girl,'—will you do this, father?"

Cherry's lips quivered and her large eyes glistened as she spoke. Her words came thick and fast at last, as if she wanted to get over what she had to say, as if she were in a hurry to hear whether her father really could forgive her, or, if not, at once to know the worst.

"Forgive thee, girl! Aye, God knows I've done that long ago. Only I felt as if I could

never trust you again; but I will now, I will, —and I 'll try not only to do that, but to forget all, and I think I shall when you are an honest man's honest wife. Oh, Cherry, you 've removed a load from my poor heart, which was nigh to breaking, and you 'll never repent the step you 're taking,—I 'm sure you won't."

"I hope not, father."

The tone of utter hopelessness these few words were spoken in did not strike the father's ear.

"May God Almighty bless and prosper you, my child, and may the dark cloud that has been over us so long be cleared away by sunshine and happiness!"

CHAPTER VII.

"I'LL do as you wish; I'll give you no more trouble!"

Those words rang in Cherry's mind all that night; and, oh, how long the night did seem! The tick of the old Dutch clock, which reverberated in her room in the stillness of darkness, seemed slower than ever. And at the best of times it was a slow, lazy-sounding tick; and the hours seemed to take a hundred and twenty minutes before they struck; but all things have an end, and so had that miserable night. But with the dawn came no comfort; all the horrible future as George Cooper's wife, which had been visioned out in the night, seemed, out with the broad light of day, insupportable. Tired and weary, for she had slept scarcely at all—her cough, hard and noisy, rousing her from the half-dreamy state she now and then fell into, the thread of facts never thoroughly

being broken—Cherry viewed her promise as impossible to fulfil. But how to escape from it or what to do she had not time to think, for she had to hasten down to prepare her father's breakfast.

"I have the day before me," she thought, and so she cast her care aside, till, when alone, she could dwell on it and seek some way of evading the fulfilment of her word.

Her father was kind, almost tender, in his manner, and spoke gently to her of her cough; he had not seemed to heed it before, but now he appeared anxious and bade her be careful and nurse it.

"Keep up a good fire," he said, as he was preparing to leave for his day's duty, "for it's bitterly cold; and don't go out, it's not fit for you with that cough; besides," he added, "I'm going round by Cooper's cottage, and perhaps you'll have a visitor—"

"Oh, father, no!" cried Cherry, hastily, the colour mounting her thin pale cheek; "not to-day! Please ask him not to come to-day: to morrow, if he will, but not to-day."

"As you like, girl," replied her father, evidently a little disappointed: "to-morrow, then, let it be. But it's rather hard on the lad; however, I'll try and smooth it to him."

Cherry stood at the door and watched her father go; then, hastily putting all things straight and attending to her ordinary household matters, she drew her father's old chair near the fire and sat down to think deliberately—to make up her mind what to do. Four and twenty hours was what she had before her, not more; for George Cooper would be there by that time on the morrow, she was sure of that. He must be very fond of her, she thought, to wish, after all that had happened, still to make her his wife. Poor George! But his wife she could never be; happen what might, she could never be that. Then how escape it?—how free herself from her given word? And how to do so before the morrow, or at any rate before the moment came when she must see him? Doubtless he knew already she had given her plighted word. Then she thought of her father, his returning affection, his forgiveness, his blessing; could she, to retain all that, sacrifice herself? Could she not, if she made a firm resolve that she would? After all, she was but asked to accept a good and honest man for her husband. Ah, that was it—for her husband! No—ten thousand times, no! She could never let another man's lips press hers again; she knew, she felt, Cyril Treherne and

she were never more to meet, but none other should or could be to her what he had been. She lingered again over those rapt moments when he had heedlessly taught her what it was to love; she recalled the thrilling ecstasy of the first kiss given simply and naturally when he bade her farewell, but it shot like electric fire through her blood, making her heart beat with a wild and new joy. And now, even now, it stirred up every drop of blood circulating through her veins; the bare recollection of those short-lived moments was enough to drive her passion past control. She calmed down after a little, and then sat staring vacantly at the fire, as if she were in its fitful flames to read what she was to do, what was the best step for her to take.

Then after a little came forth the old cry of the distressed and the sorrowful, those who sorrow without hope of relief—and they form the majority—the old cry, to be let die!

"If I could but die," she moaned out, half aloud, "and be out of every one's way!"

It is a sad desire for a young girl barely eighteen, yet many there are who have wished for it—aye, and prayed for it—that have lived on nevertheless, but that have lived also to feel

that perhaps it would have been better had their prayers been granted.

"But I can't die," went on poor Cherry, "I can't die by my own hand"; and her thoughts turned to the smooth, rippling sea on that night when it was not wild enough to make death beneath its waves seem possible. But might it not be more stormy to-night? Should she wait and see? and would she have the courage when the time came to cast herself in? Could she throw her poor frail body into the roaring waters to be dashed against those jagged rocks that would tear her to pieces? Could she deliberately do this when it must entail such an end? She doubted her own courage even when not in sight of the boundless sea she yet longed to make her grave.

Then flashed, as if still more to deter her, across her young and ignorant mind that there was something after death to meet. There is the hereafter that conscience tells us must be either glad or sad, according to our works; and what hereafter dare a suicide hope for? Guilty of the only crime which admits of no repentance, what is the chance of forgiveness? Is it not our bounden duty to wait patiently the summons from Him who gave us life? Is it not, setting aside the great sin, even more

wise to bide our time, whatever may be our trials, than attempt to run away from them, rushing blindly into God alone knoweth what? Surely no greater madness was ever half so desperate as to attempt bursting the bonds that bind us to the world and sorrow by suicide. It is better for us surely to

> "Bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of."

And so that "dread of something after death" made Cherry resolve on leaving in God's keeping the life He created.

But then what to do? Go—go away. But where? She had no money, no friends. She went once; and but for the one—that one whose image she treasured as Veronica treasured the cloth with her Lord's image on it—she would have died alone on those solitary hills without a being to have whispered a farewell to her. Yet, for all that, there was no other escape left her. If she remained, she must fulfil her contract, or tell her father it was impossible; and she had the courage for neither. The first she had already put aside as utterly out of her power; the second she thought over. Supposing she told her father that night that for all her given word she could

never be George Cooper's wife, would he not turn again to the stern, unforgiving man she had found him for three long months? And could she brook his severity and coldness, and taunts and reproaches?

It seemed too hard a future to face if she could escape it. Besides, what he had said to her she felt to be very true. She could not go on leading the life she had been doing of late. She must of necessity see people at some time or another. She must be thrown in contact with those who would consider themselves polluted by the mere touch of her hand. So she must go. She saw no other solution for her difficulty. By that means she escaped all her troubles,—that is, all her present ones. But what fresh ones might crop up through the step she contemplated taking she had not the forethought to picture. To her, "sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof."

This time, at any rate, she would go with a less reproachful conscience. She could write to her father and tell him truthfully her reason for leaving him. She had no secret to hide; no wrong to cloak over. This was a comforting reflection to her in her deep, reckless state of misery.

Now her mind was made up she felt relieved.

She drew a long breath, and looked around her home, once so peaceful and contented. Her heart swelled for a moment with the pain she felt at parting with it, its memories, its reminiscences. And then she thought of her father, of his feeling of desolation when he found her gone—gone once more, and—for ever. She thought of none of these things on her previous flight. Then she hardly knew what she was doing. She had but one thought, one idea—to go to Cyril Treherne, to see him, to speak to him once more. Home, father, friends, none of these troubled her an instant. But now it was otherwise. She walked round, looking at what had been her household gods. They, like all the rest, were little to her now; but still she looked at them, as we do at a picture that recalls to our mind not alone the spot it represents, but reminiscences connected with it, of friends who were with us and to whom we have since bid farewell, of happy hours and sunny days,—perhaps of cloudy moments, too, but they are generally forgotten in pleasanter recollections. So it was that as Cherry took up an alabaster basket containing wax fruit, all looking wondrously ripe, she forgot the moment when, as a bit of a child, she let drop a big bright-green fig, breaking it

in pieces, and was sent to bed for her stupidity, and only remembered the day when, some years later, her father gave her the little basket and all its contents as a reward for her industry; and from that moment it had formed the chief ornament of the large shelf, where it stood in the centre of her other valuables. Also the little white china lamb, with its dab of brick red on either side, and made so rough that it scratched her baby fingers when one night she took it with her to bed to comfort her under some infantile distress. Then there were the two prints of William and Mary, their Protestant majesties, with gorgeous frames in honour of their principles and noses. How well she recollected admiring the great sausage curls that surrounded their hard, orthodox faces, and thinking when she was big she would wear just the same dress, if she could get it, as Queen Mary!

Poor Cherry! how she longed, ignorant as she was, simple-minded as she was, to be the child once more in tastes and feelings! Have we not all in our weary lives longed for the same—aye, longed with an intenseness amounting in itself to agony to know nothing of wickedness or wrong or evil passions, to feel, if only for half an hour, the pure, inno-

cent ignorance of youth,—to cleanse ourselves from the miserable lore we so rapidly became familiar with when once we were in contact with the world? But we cannot pass through mire without being soiled. We cannot even pluck roses without filling our fingers with thorns.

But Cherry could not spend more time in lingering over the sweet recollections of the past. Besides,

"All farewells should be sudden when for ever,"

and she was fated never more after that night to see her childhood's home again. There was her letter yet to write, and to one who did not write a letter a year it was no mean task she had before her. Then there were numberless little things to see to. Had she been going to die that night she could not have felt a greater amount of matters to attend to; trifles as they might appear to you or me, yet they were important to her, and that she earnestly wished to leave settled. What she intended taking away with her were, with one exception, mere necessaries. She soon put together such clothing as she could conveniently carry, and that she could hardly do without. Around her neck—it had never left it day or night—hung her greatest treasure, the locket with Cyril's

hair in it, his gift, dearer to her far than its weight in diamonds would have been; and in the little box which had contained it was a withered flower, a dead, colourless bit of—what had been—scarlet geranium, the piece that fell from Cyril's button-hole the day he bade her kiss him. It had been pressed in her Bible till that afternoon when she had left her home merely to see him once more, and, as she had not taken her Bible, the flower was put in the little pasteboard box that had contained her trinket, and there she had kept it ever since. These were her only treasures. She might have been robbed of all her scant wardrobe, and it would not have cost her a second thought; but the little white gilt-edged box and the dead flower, now all grey, were sacred to her from his hand having touched them, and no other eye but her own had looked on them since they had become hers. As she feasted on them with a loving expression in her great sad eyes, before consigning them to the centre of her bundle, wild thoughts flitted through her brain that perhaps she might meet him in her wanderings, she might see him once more, she might be yet allowed to feel his warm breath on her cheek, his lips once again pressed to hers; and, if so—if only

for one brief moment—how happily could she die! And then she went down on her knees, the little box clasped in her hand, and, lifting her beautiful eyes upwards, looking as if they could pierce through the whitewashed roof and see the boundless heavens above, she implored in piteous accents but earnest prayer that God would grant her that one great boon. The very intensity of her own words inspired confidence, and she rose up with faith and hope and believing.

And, if prayers are heard, would not this simple, earnest petition be carried by willing angels to the throne of the King of kings? It is true she was but a poor, weak, ignorant girl, and might be asking what would, were it granted, but bring greater sorrow on her; but it did not seem so, it could injure no one, and that is no bad criterion for deciding whether a matter be right or not; and if she willingly consented to suffer patiently and unrepiningly, whatever might be the result, surely she might, having free will, make her own choice? Such thoughts as these, half rebellious, half yielding, passed through her mind as she finished putting together her things. It did not occur to her that God might be more merciful to us than we would be to ourselves.

The day was now far advanced, and she must write her letter before her father's return; all must be ready, all prepared for her departure, which, however, she did not contemplate making till after her father had left in the morning. She could not go without seeing him once more; she yearned to hear his voice speak again to her in kindly tones; she wanted his blessing to go with her; and so she must remain under the roof that had sheltered her so many years yet another night, for it would be impossible for her to leave whilst he was in the house,—his room-door was generally open, and he would hear the least movement.

She wrote her letter. It was simple and short. She said her heart felt ready to burst at the thought of leaving him; but she could not bring herself to become George Cooper's wife. She had tried to make up her mind, but every feeling in her revolted so thoroughly against it that it was impossible. She also pointed out the wrong she would be doing George himself in promising to do what she could never perform. Then she went on to say that she felt how right her father was that she could not go on living as she had done lately. "So," she continued, "I have resolved to go away, —not as I did before, dear father, I have

nothing to hide this time; I only go to relieve you of the shame and sorrow I have brought on you, and to try and lead an honest life. I can work, you know, and I will work cheerfully to support myself. If any good befall me, you shall hear it; if only more trouble, more difficulties, then I will try to battle through them without giving you the misery of sharing them. God bless you, dear father; think kindly of your poor child sometimes, and pray for me, as I will, night and morning, for you."

Then she sealed it up, blotched all over as it was with great tears, that had half blinded her as she wrote, and that would fall, try hard as she did to keep them back. Now all was done, and she longed for her father's return. She felt half afraid of herself when there was nothing further to occupy her thoughts. The future did not bear contemplation; it was such an utter blank that, desperate as was her position, it wanted courage to face it—to go forth, friendless and penniless, into a hard and selfish world, for a girl of eighteen, whose life, though in a poor and humble sphere, had yet been one free from want or adversity in any shape. It was the very ignorance of what she might have to encounter that enabled her to go

forth as she did, yet she did not care to sit quietly and let her mind wander in a labyrinth of mystery as to what would be her fate.

It was a fine night for the time of year, clear and frosty, and she stood gazing out of the door, with a shawl wrapped round her, at the pale, silvery moon gleaming on the sea, and the spangled waves, over which tiny stars seemed to be leaping and dancing in the mysterious, shadowy light. In the far distance she saw a ship with her sails unfurled and sweeping over the still waters as if borne by some invisible agency. Strange it should be so, brought up as she had been in the very midst of them, yet ships never pleased Cherry Mason; they always called forth a melancholy feeling, and now more so than ever. Beautiful as the scene was she was contemplating, she thankfully turned away from it as she heard her father's footsteps approaching. At first, in the stillness, she imagined she heard the steps of more than one; however that might be, he came in alone, and greeted her more in his old manner than she had known him do for many a long weary day. She hardly met him as affectionately as she might. She felt she was acting a lie in all she did and said, and it sorely went against her, though she knew she

was doing no wrong, or at least intended none; but she was more watchful, more anxious, notwithstanding the oppression that weighed on her. She got his pipe ready for him; she placed his chair as she knew he liked best; she put the lamp so that all the little light it gave he benefited by; she fetched his old slippers, and then she lingered about him still, though she did not go and sit by him or volunteer any caress. She was restless and uneasy; it was getting late, later than usual for her to be up, still she could not make up her mind to go to bed. She knew she should see that rough, sunburnt, but kind face no more. She knew it was the last time he and she would rest under the same roof, at least for many a long year, for once gone she could not return till—till perhaps he was taken away altogether from out this sorrowful world. And then, at that thought, came a wavering in her resolution, a trembling at her sinking heart that made her fear the task she had imposed on herself, and doubtful whether she could bear up against the trial when the moment came.

At any rate she would stay no more there; the mere sight of that dear face gave her unnecessary pangs; so she bid him good night, softly and tenderly. She kissed him, and then

kissed him again, though she knew she might see him again at dawn; then, after going upstairs, she made an excuse to return and once more exchanged a "good night"; then, just as she was going upstairs, he recalled her.

"I forgot, girl, to tell you, George will be here for a few minutes to-morrow morning, before going to the quarries."

"Very well, father," she replied, her heart thumping at her side almost to suffocation. She wanted no longer the courage to carry out her project. Those few words sufficed to make her feel thankful that before George Cooper would cross the threshold of her home she would have passed out of it for the last time—driven out of it, not by coldness and unkindness, but by over-much love.

She slept better than she had done the previous night. The mind is more at rest when a decision has been arrived at; the irrevocable is a better pillow than uncertainty. So she awoke between five and six o'clock, refreshed and strengthened, but with such a heavy weight oppressing her that, till memory came out thoroughly roused and clear, she could not understand what overwhelming calamity was overhanging her; and then, though scarcely lightened by the recollection of the step she

was about to take, she felt she must be up and stirring, and ready to start forth on her weary way as soon as her father was gone. She was in the parlour before he was, and had the fire lighted and his breakfast ready for him.

And Mason took it for a good omen. His girl was intending to do what was right, not by halves, but thoroughly and inflexibly. She would not start back at any little difficulties that might present themselves. She would go unflinchingly on along the straight, narrow, hard, stony path of duty to the end, and be a comfort to him yet. He was in great spirits this morning, seeing everything *couleur de rose.* There was no foreshadowing of the blow that was so soon to fall on him, and fall, too, with a more crushing weight from the very hopefulness that filled his heart so short a while beforehand.

Cherry could not be down-hearted with her father so blithesome and merry. She half caught some of his cheeriness; and it was only when, after patting her on the head, and saying something in a light tone about their having at last reached the turning in the dismal lane they had been labouring through so long, and, bidding her "good-bye" with an affectionate but by no means doleful "God bless you," she

saw him gradually disappearing in the distance, and at last when he turned away behind a ridge of rocks that led to his beat she entirely lost sight of him, that the whole desolateness and hopelessness of her position burst upon her with all its full and cruel force.

With that innate faith in the efficacy of prayer which, thank God, few of us are without, she fell back on it as the only comfort left her in her despair. But no words came forth; her lips were mute, she knew not what to ask. Her bitter cry at last was, "God be merciful to me!"

And *that* prayer was heard: God *was* merciful to her.

With her small packet under her arm, her large cloak covering her, a thick veil over her face, and her head bent low, she started on her lone, desperate journey. Her steps were quick till she passed—not through, she skirted it—the village; then she went slower. The rapid pace and sharp, keen air had brought on a long fit of coughing, and she rested a few minutes on an old mile-stone till able to go on without over-distressing herself. On and on she went without aim or object but that of putting as much distance between her home and herself as it was possible for her to do.

At last, hunger and fatigue, those terrible weapons against which none can strive, gained the mastery over her; and, seeing a cow-shed in a field close by, she passed through a gate that led to it. So, exhausted, and with hardly strength to place a bundle of straw so that she could rest her head upon it, she lay down with an undefined hope she might sleep there never to wake again.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHAT the devil is all this row about" asked Frank Delafield one day, as he met Charley St. Aubyn in the High Street, Sedgeport, "between old Daddy Thorpe and Snakes and Treherne, and some other fellow—I don't recollect who? I suppose little Thorpe will be the victim, eh?"

"'Pon my life I can't tell you. I hardly underthand it mythelf; but the governor knowth, I believe, and I'll athk him all about it. Where did you hear it?"

"Hear it?—why everywhere!"

"And what did you hear?"

"Well, that Treherne has bagged some fellow's daughter and carried her off to sea,—that's one version: another—and old Phil Kingsford told me this—that a girl has disappeared whose father saved Treherne when he was wrecked in the spring off Prawle Point,

and it is thought she is with him; though he did not take her, as Jack Mayne told me, for she was at home with her father for a month or two after he left."

"I dare thay iths all a lie together! People are tho fond of thaying thingths not true jutht for the pleathure of hearing their own voithes. I don't believe Thyril would do anything dithonourable, and that would be; bethides, he wath awfully in love with Willie Thorpe. I don't believe a word of it!"

"Well, I dare say you're right. But, hang it all! it's rather hard for a fellow to be accused and judged and sentenced all behind his back, and not a chance of defending himself. Holloa! there's Mayne! Here, old fellow, come over here!"

The young men greeted one another warmly enough, though Captain Mayne seemed to think stripling Frank rather too forward and swaggering for nineteen, for all his six feet two that he measured; but Frank could hold his own even against Jack Mayne, and was not to be put down by looks or manner—nothing short of words would have done that.

"What are you doing at Sedgeport?" asked Mayne of St. Aubyn; "surely there's some attraction here unknown to me that has

brought you; and yet I thought I had sifted it from the parson and his family down to the turnpike-gate house, which means from one extreme point to the other, and there 's nothing worth cultivating, believe me."

"One would think he was afraid you would poach on his preserves, Charley, to hear him, unasked, cry down the people and place," said Frank. "If I were you I would look around and judge for myself."

"I have thomthing elth to do," answered St. Aubyn. "I didn't come for amuthement or my own affairth; it ith for my lady mother, if you mutht know: I have no end of commithions for her to do."

"Have you heard anything more of the Treherne scandal?" asked Frank, addressing the captain; "any more truth or falsehood?"

"No, I have seen no one who could tell me anything more; but you ought to know the real state of the case, St. Aubyn?"

"But I do not, and I do not believe a word I have heard."

"Oh, there is something in it, depend upon it, or it would have been contradicted."

"Who 's there to contradict it?" asked Frank, hotly, feeling sorry at the thought of poor Willie's distress, should it reach her ears.

"Why, the old people at Treherne, to be sure!"

"And thuppothing they never heard it?"

Jack Mayne gave a prolonged whistle.

"A likely thing that! Why all Sandcombe and Stanmore, and this, our noble town of Sedgeport, can talk of nothing else. A good idea that!"

"Well, I'm blest if I won't go over and ask them," said Frank.

"Better not," said Charley. "If it were true, it would be awkward. Better let a woman tackle them; my mother ith the one, the 'll do it, and do it without paining them, you thee."

"Yes, aunt Charlotte does do things awfully well," said Frank, in an admiring tone. "I hope Conny will take after her; then she 'll be of use sometimes, for she 's never that now."

"Brothers never find their sisters what they should be," said Captain Mayne, as if vexed by the lad's remark; "they 're always stupid and in the way. At any rate, Frank, you won't be troubled just at present by finding Miss Delafield *de trop*, and she will be married before you are old enough to suffer the pangs of love and the tortures of a tender passion. If I 'm not mistaken, St. Aubyn here is awfully spoony on his cousin; aren't you, Charley?"

"The devil a bit am I thpoony on any one, nor do I ever intend to be. Look what a bother it ith; haven't we a preciouth exthample before uth now in Treherne? However, if ever I have the mithfortune to be caught, I will thtick to the thpot; I won't go off in a yacht and leave my good-natured friendth to cut me up and accuthe me of riding rough shod through the motht ungentlemanly of the commandments. Hang it all! if oneth friendth thpeak tho of one, I would rather leave my reputation in the keeping of my enemieth; for I thould have a chance, at any rate, of their not being believed."

The three young men were walking down High Street, talking as they went along, when they saw Philip Kingsford coming up the road on horseback; he was in uniform, and seemed intent on business; he was going at a sharp pace, his eyes down, and with a serious expression on his face.

"Halloa, major!" shouted out the irrepressible Frank, "where are you off to at that rattling rate? Hold hard a minute if you can."

Philip Kingsford pulled up, though evidently not caring for the interruption, but he was good natured and liked the boy, with his frank,

fair face; he was old enough, too, not to be annoyed by his forwardness and pretended manhood,—it could not interfere with him, in his old bachelor's path, whatever it might do with younger men.

"I am off to Yardley Wood, Master Frank," he answered, smiling; and his smile was a very sweet one, and lit up his good honest, plain face with a wonderful brightness. "What are you three fellows doing here?—up to any mischief?"

"Awfully slow mischief, if there be any at all," said Frank. "I will tell you exactly what each of us is about. Charley—"

"Hold your row, Frank; I can thpeak for myself. I am here to buy tea, and a lot of paper, and a thaddle for the new mare, and no end of oak palingth, and—"

"Are you going to be married, St. Aubyn, that you are going to purchase such a mixture of strange articles?" asked the major, laughing.

"What a fool you are, Charley! Can't you say aunt Charlotte sent you to do her shopping?"

"And Sir Gilbert's as well, I take it," said Jack Mayne. "I don't suppose Lady St. Aubyn intends making any individual use of the palings, as they are to be of oak! I'm

here," he continued, dolefully, "because I have no better place to be in."

"Hard lines that, isn't it, major?" said Frank. "Now *I* am here because I like it."

"Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself," replied Kingsford. "Good-day to you all."

"Stop a moment," shouted Frank, striding after him with his long legs. "You don't believe this about Treherne, do you?" His boyish face looked flushed and eager, and his long white fingers played with the horse's silky mane as he spoke.

"Why do you ask me, Frank? It surely cannot concern you."

"No, of course it can't; and it's d—d stupid of me to care a farthing rushlight about it; but I was thinking how awfully sorry I should be if that pretty little thing, Willie Thorpe, were to hear it. You see people are all talking about it, and people are so d—d kind in telling what there's no good in their knowing; and you know how awfully she likes Treherne."

"Don't swear so, Frank," said Kingsford, with the least degree of asperity; then, as if conscious he had spoken in an irritated tone, he added in his usual kind, friendly manner, "it's a bad habit, my dear boy. I think it

very unlikely that the whole is true; at any rate I hope, with you, people will not gossip about it; time enough when a matter is proved to spread it abroad"; and Major Kingsford rode on.

"I don't like the way that old codger answered me," thought Frank Delafield, as he strode back to his friends.

"I am afraid I did not speak with the honesty and straight-forwardness on this terrible question to that boy that his own kindly nature deserved; and I am afraid I should more glory in the very worst being true than be relieved at finding the whole a fabrication. Good God, is it possible I have come to this!"

Such were Major Kingsford's thoughts, as, putting his horse into a canter, he went rapidly along the hard dusty road, the echo of his horse's feet being carried back to Frank's ear long after the rider was out of sight. Such were his thoughts, and so he felt; but he dared not sift too narrowly the cause for this seemingly unkind, uncharitable state. He rode on fast, and never drew in rein till he reached the foot of the steep hill that led up to the Yardley Wood farm, about half a mile from the house; then, in spite of himself, he fell a-thinking, and all sorts of distorted pictures of his future, and

Treherne's future, and Willie's future presented themselves. He shook off the wild thoughts and foolish hopes as he would shake off a flake of snow from his coat; and the former were not more trifling, or meaningless, or more productive of results than the latter, but they came again and again, till, thank goodness, the top of the hill was reached at last; then he put his horse into a trot and soon reached the lodge gates, and then went on quietly till he came to the flight of marble steps leading to the hall-door.

Willie was standing with her hat on, and a little scarlet cloak over her shoulders, with Dust at her feet, just at the entrance to the little garden which was specially looked on as her own. A narrow, winding path led into it; it was quite hidden by shrubs, and you could not imagine such a fairy spot could be near till your eye suddenly fell upon it. Though yet early in the season, she had been sitting there reading, in a sheltered nook around which grew a mass of violets and primroses, perfuming the air. She had heard the tramp of horse's feet, and she came out to see who it could be; for unexpected visitors at Yardley Wood, like most other country places, were rare. For a moment a smile parted her full red lips as she saw

who it was, and at once she went up, cordially welcoming her old friend in her natural, unaffected manner.

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure!" she said, holding out her little hand, which was eagerly and affectionately seized, and held for a moment in Philip's strong and powerful grasp. "I was wondering when we should see your dear kind face again, it seems so long since you were here"; and she looked up lovingly with her deep blue eyes at his bronzed, ugly face; they were no longer the merry laughing eyes of yore, there was a tinge of melancholy over them that, for all that, made them none the less beautiful.

"Let me get rid of my horse, Willie," said the major, not daring to trust himself to reply to her words or look till he had mastered a certain agitation that for a moment was seen working in every feature of his face.

"I will go with you to the stables," she said, placing her hand within his arm, and walking by his side; then presently she said, "I am so glad you are come, Philip; I have wanted you so much. I almost thought of writing to you and asking you to come over: would you not have been astonished at receiving a private and confidential from me?" she added, looking up

with an arch smile, far more like her old self than she had been for days or weeks.

"No, Willie, I should not; and I should have come at once: you know that, child, do you not?" He asked the question with a sudden earnestness, and standing still as he spoke. "You know that to serve you, to please you, to —to do anything under heaven that is in the power of mortal man for you, is my only—is a pleasure to me."

The last words were spoken in a different tone, and with a different manner; all the fiery energy that for a moment his feelings surprised him into subsided, and he spoke them almost with indifference.

Willie hardly knew what to make of it; she was at first half frightened at his vehemence, but the next moment she smiled at her own folly, and answered him kindly, assuring him of the great affection she too felt for him. They were walking down the terrace walk now, having left the horse at the stables.

"And what is it you want me to do, or how—"

"Hush! there 's papa; don't say anything before him, please."

"What, has not the old confidence been restored yet? I am sorry, Willie, very; for after all you have no truer friend on earth."

"Hush! do be quiet."

"Well, Thorpe, how are you? I hope I am welcome, though uninvited."

"None can ever be more so, Kingsford? How is this—in uniform?"

"And I never noticed it!" exclaimed Willie; "and yet," she continued naïvely, "I did think you were looking better than usual."

"Fine feathers make fine birds. The truth is I was in such a hurry to come over to you, for I have news to tell you"—here Willie's cheek blanched, and she looked up so pleadingly that he added instantly, "news that only concerns myself, however—that I did not even give myself the time to don my mufti."

"It is good news then, I'll wager," said William Thorpe, "or you would not have been in such a hurry about it. Has any one left you a fortune?"

"Not exactly that; still it is, I suppose, what would be called good news. I have been offered the military attachéship at Munich."

"I don't call that good news," interrupted Willie, "if it take you away from Sedgeport, which I suppose it will."

"Yes, if I accept it," replied the major, looking down at the young girl with a grateful expression for the kind remark; "but that is

what I came over to talk to you about, Thorpe —the advisability of refusing or accepting."

"When must you send in your answer?"

"By to-morrow evening's post. It must be at the Horse Guards by Saturday morning."

"Then we have plenty of time before us. You sleep here, of course?"

"If it will not put you out?"

"I think you and I, Philip, are past being put out by one another in any way. There 's your room; it 's always ready. I know no one else ever occupies it, however great the pressure may be for room. Willie and old Storks seem to think 'the major's room' would be desecrated by any other than himself sleeping in it."

"No, papa, it is not that; but I think it would be very uncomfortable for Philip to find all his little things that he leaves there stowed away, as if he were occupying a room in an hotel, whilst some other strangers' were put there in their place; besides, it is his room, and there are plenty more, without borrowing it even for a night."

"You spoil me, Willie," said Kingsford, his broad chest heaving with a suppressed sigh.

"I could not do that, Philip," replied the

young girl, ingenuously; "you are too good, —you will never be spoilt."

"Well, let us go in to luncheon, and stop paying one another compliments," said Mr. Thorpe; "the bell rang fully half an hour ago."

When luncheon was over, the whole meal having been almost a form, as no one ate anything—all three were far too much occupied with that which concerned each individually to enjoy the luxury of being hungry—Mr. Thorpe proposed a walk to Major Kingsford, and as the major thought it would be as well to hear all the father had to say before discussing the subject—he knew well it would be one and the same—with the daughter, he agreed readily, and left the dinner-room with his host. Willie looking up reproachfully, being left behind; but Philip had no sooner reached the hall than he turned back through the gallery, telling Thorpe to wait one moment, and said to Willie, whose countenance showed her vexation,—

"I shall be in your garden, Willie, or down in the hollow by the river, at five o'clock. Shall I find you in either place?—and, if so, which?"

"I will be in the hollow," she replied. "Papa is doing it on purpose, Philip," she added, an angry colour mounting her cheek.

"Doing what, child?"

"Taking you off to tell you a lot of things that I don't believe, but that I wanted to ask you about. Don't believe a word that is unkind of—of any one!"

"Very well; five o'clock in the hollow."

Willie nodded and watched the major's tall figure and broad shoulders, which looked taller and broader than ever in his uniform, walk along the gallery into the hall where her father was waiting for him; then she betook herself to her little sanctum, till the time neared for her to be down at the hollow.

The poor child had a great deal she wished to tell her old friend when she got him alone for half an hour; but she was not quite prepared with the way or the words in which to make her confession. She thought the most comfortable would be to blurt it all out at once, but what is most comfortable is not always the most proper; she might talk in that simple, artless manner to her dog or her owl, but scarcely to Major Kingsford, so she endeavoured to frame her communication in fitting words, all of which, however, flew to the winds when she was sitting down on the old beech stump by the hurrying, restless river. It was a quarter to five when she got there, so she had

fifteen minutes to get through, which she did in the most profitless manner, by trying to imagine what in the world her father found to say that would occupy more than two whole hours. She thought a tenth part of that time would suffice to tell Major Kingsford all the gossip he had heard, and which had reached her also; but this difference existed, that her father believed it, and she did not. And yet a kind of weight was hanging at her heart, and there rose up a great dark cloud in the horizon of her future that all her trusting abiding love could not penetrate.

At last Philip Kingsford's stalwart figure appeared at the furthest end of the lawn, issuing from behind a thick shrubbery of laurels; he came, she thought, with a heavy footstep and a downcast brow. Did he then believe all her father had told him? or was there more that he could have learnt than she ever dreamt of? Fortunately these disturbing questions must soon be settled, for he was by her side now, his good, kind face looking at her with a strangely tender expression.

"I am punctual, am I not?" he asked, cheerfully as to tone, but with a smile that, do what he would, was melancholy.

"As punctual as old Widow Cragg's clock,

which she declares has never lost or gained a minute since Cragg's death: then it stopped short for a whole day and night. What a pity we cannot be shoved on like clocks, and so be forced to make up for lost time."

"Why, have you lost so much that the hours reproach you?"

"I suppose we all have, and continue to do so more or less; for instance, I consider I have lost two mortal hours this very afternoon."

"And why, pray?"

"Because," and Willie coloured slightly, "I could not set my mind to anything, knowing that at this hour I had arranged to talk with you."

"And is that such a terrible ordeal, Willie, that the bare thought of it distressed you so much that you could not occupy yourself in any other way than pondering over it?"

"Dear Philip," and Willie's voice was coaxing and appealing, "you know what I mean, and yet you won't understand."

"Perhaps I do, child, more than you think for. But come, tell me, what is it that has made your cheeks look paler and thinner, and your bright eyes heavy and dimmed?"

"You know all that people are saying?" she asked, in a questioning tone, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, I have heard a rumour; but, as a rule, all such gossiping talk as you allude to is false."

"Philip, do *you* believe it to be false?"

Willie fixed her deep blue eyes on the honest face before her. She knew he had never told a lie in his life; she knew he would not tell one now, and she staked the hopes of her future happiness on the words he would utter in reply. It was an agonizing moment; his very silence augured ill to her chances: her heart beat, her breath came quick, and he sat there immovable and seemingly impassive. At last he raised his large grey eyes softly and slowly (they were the best feature in his face, and in his early youth he had learned that), and fixed them on her poor, imploring face. There was little of her Hebe beauty left; it was more of the Magdalen in its sorrow and earnestness, though wanting in that resignation we are accustomed to see in the pictures of that most beautiful of sinners.

"Willie, if I told you I believed it, what then? Would you hate me?"

"Hate *you!*" she answered, slowly, her face as pale as the swift clouds that the wind was driving rapidly across the skies. "What would there be to make me hate you?"

"Nothing," he replied, in an absent tone; "it was a stupid remark," he added, carelessly; and then, mastering the weakness he felt was gaining head with him, he continued in his old kind and interested manner, "You have put a plain, straightforward question to me: I will answer you as well as I can. Do not think I want to beat about the bush, child, because I do not say 'Yes' or 'No' at once. In the first place, I can only reply as far as *I* know: as yet I do not know what *you* may have heard."

"Oh, something very horrible," she replied, finding Philip was silent, "about a sailor's daughter. Philip, tell me this," and she grasped his arm convulsively, and looked up with terrible misery written on her face, "*is* she with him? I could bear all but that!" she added, in an under-tone, and as if to herself.

"I believe she is, Willie," he replied, slowly, but with a terrible distinctness, at least it so sounded to her ear; every word fell like a bullet of ice on her miserable heart—fell cold, hard, and cruel.

"Oh, my God! if—if you *will* but take me away, or—destroy my memory!" was the bitter cry—the only prayer that came to her lips in that moment of anguish.

She did not speak again; she asked no more

questions; all the rest might be true or false, it mattered little if that one fact were true; and true it must be, or Philip Kingsford would not have said so. For a moment she covered her face with her two hands, then she seemed to have gained sufficient control over herself to walk home. She had felt giddy, as if she could not stand under the influence of the shock, and, getting up from that old beech-stump where she had passed the happiest moments, and the bitterest, of her young life, she walked slowly, and with a heavy step, by Philip's side till they came to the gallery-window. It was open, she passed in, little Dust leaping over the steps, in that blessed ignorance of sorrow where dogs have the advantage over us, and going on before her mistress; Willie, never turning her head round once, scarcely seemed aware that her old friend stood aside to let her pass. Had she, she must have been struck with the anguish depicted on his good, kind face—anguish deep enough to be a reflection of her own. On she went up to her room; then, gently closing the door and locking it, she sat down, broken hearted, to commune with her great misery alone and unseen.

CHAPTER IX.

HAVE you ever felt, reader, so shipwrecked in all your hopes, so utterly cast down by a great sorrow, that you have been tempted—aye, and done it, too—to turn round on your Creator and accuse Him of injustice and cruelty: injustice for having, without any deep wrong on your part, inflicted such crushing misery on you; and cruelty for bringing you into a world that—to you—is made up of trouble and turmoil, without your will or consent, putting passions into your heart over which you have no control, letting them be roused and then trampled on, and—for what?

Willie Thorpe, in her bitter sorrow, was brought to this pass. She rebelled now in spirit against her God as she had done in words before against her father.

"Oh that it were only morning—daylight!"

was her cry at night; and in the morning the same again, "Oh, that the day were past, and I shut up alone in my own room!"

Hour after hour did the poor child sit mentally moaning over the downfall of all her bright hopes, the destruction of her future, the broken heart, the broken spirit, and yet so young!

"Would to God I were old, so that I *could* not live very long! But I am only eighteen, and I *may* live to eighty! Horrible, frightful thought—sixty-two years of this misery!"

Yet to take her life, to shorten it by her own hand, never once crossed Willie's mind, as it had done that of her poorer and more heart-broken sister in sorrow, and, had it, she would have driven the idea from her on the instant; but hers was not a nature to contemplate freeing herself from her trouble by such means. She knew the laws—both human and divine—were severe against it; and though she had never found in the Bible any mention of suicides being worse off hereafter than those who die from natural causes, still she had heard it preached so often that for her to contemplate such a fearful step was impossible. With all her purity and innocence, and deep-loving heart, and sweet Hebe face, Willie Thorpe was no extraordinary character; she was such a

one as you may meet with in every-day life—an only child, and a spoilt one, kicking against the least opposition because she had so seldom been contradicted, giving way to fractiousness and irritability if anything went counter to her wishes. She hated to be disappointed or thwarted in the merest trifle; yet she would resign of her own free-will any little pleasure, or give up any pet plan, if she found it gave pain, or otherwise caused vexation: but then she did it herself; what she disliked was being coerced.

And so she had resented her father's line of conduct with regard to Cyril Treherne, and now she resented it ten thousand times more; for, had he but allowed them to meet, Cyril would not have gone to sea, and that person—and then she stopped full short; she could not *envisager* anything concerning that *person;* her heart seemed suddenly to pucker up, and a sharp pain pass through it, whenever the misty impersonation of Cyril's companion presented itself before her.

Willie loved Cyril with a great love; he was her first and—last; all the strength and force of her affections were centred in him, and so her sorrow was proportionate. Where there is love, there is very little pride; she had not

altogether cast aside the feeling that she ought to be ashamed of giving her heart where it was no longer wanted; she taunted herself with weak and unmaidenly conduct, but such attempts to crush out her love fell tame and harmless; her pride—she never had much—was all gone. Had she had the chance, there were moments—and they were not rare—when she would have gone down on her knees to him, and asked *his* pardon for her condemnation of *his* short-comings.

Her difficulty lay in not knowing what to do, what line to adopt, or what path to tread. He would soon be home—at least his letters said so; they remained the same, his t one was not changed, and he wrote as frequently as he had obtained permission to do when he left; his last long silence had been satisfactorily accounted for by two letters coming together, one dated three weeks earlier than the other. But had not Harriet Henderson since confirmed her first hint, thrown out long since, by telling her "*because* she liked her so much, and was so sorry for her," that she *knew* he had taken a young girl from her home, and taken her with him in his yacht; and that the poor father and her lover—for she was on the eve of being married—were

both crushed down with grief and shame? Harriet Henderson knew it, and Philip Kingsford believed it. What more confirmation of the horrid story was needed?

Then would Cyril's words ring out clearly in her ear, words he spoke that evening when they were taking their last walk together at Treherne,—"Nothing will make you break the silent vows of your heart?" And, "Nothing, so help me God!" was now still her inward response.

But she felt utterly bowed down with her misery; the light had gone out of her soul, and a great darkness spread over her whole being. She saw nothing beyond it; she sat day after day enveloped in it, not a gleam of any kind pierced through it. As the days grew longer and less cold she sat more out of doors, beside that restless, rushing little stream, the very sound of which seemed to soothe her, as soft dreamy music might have done.

One sunny, bright afternoon she had taken compassion upon her poor neglected pets, and took Snow and Dust down to the hollow. The owl no sooner felt himself at liberty amidst the fresh green trees than he gave vent to his pleasure in most melancholy and

hideous sounds. Dust barked at him, but he was not to be barked out of giving expression, in his own way, to his delight.

"Poor old Snow!" exclaimed his mistress; "leave him alone, Dust; let him be happy, there is so little of it for any of us."

Which few words brought back her own misery in full force and relief. "What *am* I to do!" she exclaimed, mentally, looking out with her lovely blue eyes straight across the rapid stream into the deep, dark, green woods beyond, with the sun shining brightly through the old oak branches, now laden with their delicately tinted leaves, chequering the meadow land with rich gleams and sweet shadows. The cattle were browsing in the dark spots; *they* seemed to love the shade, for they huddled one against another under that grand old tree that must have weathered more storms than any other in the length or breadth of the whole country. The very brilliancy of the weather made her more wretched: rain and wind would have been far more consonant to her feelings. But Nature is rarely sympathetic, the vilest of days will be the luck of the young girl on her bridal morning, and a bright sun will cast its happy, joyous rays over the bier that is carrying some one to his last home,

when he neither sees nor feels nor cares whether it rain or shine.

"I wish I could read or write, or do something that would occupy my mind, and prevent me thinking; for thinking is of no use,—I have done nothing else for weeks past, and I am not one atom nearer to—to anything, a beginning or an ending, or what I am to do supposing certain contingencies arise,—for instance, if he came here—but he won't, of course he won't! What would he come for? He does not care to see me; how can he? But then I shall never dare stir out, for I might meet him—meet him, and oh, what joy it would be! even—even as it is, that he cares for me no more. Oh, Cyril, why do I so love you? Why is it that I feel, to win back your love, I could stoop to any meanness, do any contemptible action?"

And the poor child covered her face with her hands, and the hot tears ran down through her fingers fast and thick. She was roused from her sorrow by a hand laid gently and kindly on her shoulder. She looked up, startled; it was her father. He had stood, poor man, an unseen witness of his child's sorrow; and when at last he saw the heaving breast, and heard the bitter sobs, he could bear

it no longer, and he came up to her side, his own eyes dim and his lips trembling from emotion.

There is no sorrow so pure and unselfish, or so nearly approaching the divine, as that which we feel when we grieve for the sorrow of others. Then the best side of our nature is alone seen; it is the spirit—the soul—sympathizing with another in distress which we have no part in; but the mere fact of witnessing its effects melts our hard hearts, and causes us to sorrow too. How gladly would William Thorpe have swept every cloud from his child's heart, and gathered them into his own, and borne uncomplainingly whatever misery they might let fall on him. And yet she thought that he had been the cause of all her wretchedness; that he might have spared all that had taken place. Ah, could she but know it, he was inwardly thanking God he had adopted such steps as had secured her safety. She, at any rate, had escaped the terrible future that she must have lived had she become Treherne's wife. Yet, though this main point was gained, there was much, very much, that had to be guarded against; and he knew too, and was now doubly sure, that she loved this worthless, unprincipled man with a strong, deep love—not a

light, frivolous fancy, but what he feared was an enduring and lasting affection. Yet she was young; she might, with change of scene, forget much that here in the old haunts she could not wipe from off the tablets of memory; and an opportunity for taking such a step now presented itself, and it was one that might be taken advantage of without rousing surprise among the curious, of which the neighbourhood, like all others, had a good stock.

"Willie," said her father, trying to command his voice, but not altogether succeeding, for it quivered at first, and his sentences were disjointed, "Willie, I have been seeking you; and now that I have found my child I find you in sorrow, and to see you so nearly breaks my heart. My darling! let there be no more reserve between us; my life has been very sad since we have ceased to be the all-in-all we were till this great shadow rose up and dimmed all our thoughts and feelings towards one another." He paused a moment, and then sat down beside her. "I have been with Philip Kingsford—" Willie looked up askingly as her father resumed: "he rode over to tell me his plans are all completed, and his departure decided on. Then we spoke of you, and I unburdened my heart to my old friend

—for it is very hard to feel a great anxiety and sorrow pressing you down, and not have one in whom you can confide—and he has made a proposition, which, if you agree to it, I will adopt. It is that we should go with him to Munich, and stay there for awhile. What do you think of the plan, Willie?"

The young girl was silent for some minutes. A struggle was going on within her. Should she agree to her father's suggestion, and so secure herself against the meeting she had been half dreading, half hoping for, a little while ago; or should she face out the downfall of her hopes, and live on as if there were no such being in life as Cyril Treherne to fear or to love? Then, again, must she really give up all belief and trust in him? Was he all that people said he was? If so, would it not be better to go? Could she really meet him—him whom she loved as she was taught to say in her Catechism that she loved her God—with indifference? And then, if she could not, if she let him see how madly, how wildly she loved him, could she ever after let mortal see her face again? No; better not tax her strength past its bearing; she would flee from the sorrow she dared not meet,—she would accept her father's offer and his love once more! Her coldness and avoid-

ance of him had in no way chilled his affection, it remained the same; and oh! love is very precious to the desolate heart, though sometimes in the bitterness of our trials we may reject it with thanklessness. But before she gave her consent to leave Yardley Wood, and without intending it, her thoughts broke forth in words,—

"Papa, is it all true? Are you certain that —he cares—for some one else? Are you quite, quite sure?"

"Quite, Willie."

"Then we had better go."

She said it in such despairing accents that they went to the very bottom of her father's heart.

"Willie, are we ever to be like this—almost strangers so far as confidences go?—nothing but cold indifference from you! And yet, child, I have done you no wrong. Great love may have made me act somewhat cautiously, but even you must admit now that I was right."

"No, papa; it never would have come to this had you not driven him away—"

"But, Willie, the—the tie existed before he left—all the time he was pretending to care for you!"

"Then what did he make the pretence for?"

"To gratify his vanity, I suppose: it could have been nothing else."

"Perhaps so! And, after all, it does not much signify what the reason was. I will try, papa, and be as I once was to you; but I do not think, as long as I live, that I shall ever be the same Willie I used to be. I seem to have lived years and years in the last few months."

"Oh, do not talk so, my child! My heart is heavy enough when I see you suffering, but when I hear you speak so hopelessly it is past enduring!"

"Don't cry, dear papa, I cannot bear to see you in grief"; and Willie took her father's hand and kissed his wet cheek; and the return of his child's love and fond ways repaid him for the agony he had suffered. After a while she asked for Philip Kingsford,—

"He has not gone without seeing me, has he?"

"No; but he thought it would be better for me to talk the matter over with you. He said were he to do so he might bias you, and he would not like to have the responsibility of that."

"Is he for or against it, then?"

"For it. He is very anxious about it; so

shall we go and tell him? He is in the gallery, reading the newspaper."

"Poor Philip! always anxious to do what he thinks will make people happy. How unselfish and good he is!"

"You may well say that," replied her father; "a better man, a truer friend, never walked the face of God's earth."

"I am willing to go, Philip," said Willie, as, having reached the house, she went into the gallery where Major Kingsford sat with the *Western Morning News* in his hand, but which he could scarcely be said to be reading; and she held out her hand, which he took and kept in his for a moment, then she looked round.

"I thought papa was there," she said. "We have made it up, Philip," she continued, making a poor attempt at a smile. "I have been very ungrateful to him, I dare say, but I could not help it: he sees things one way; I another."

As Willie spoke she twisted the ribbon of her hat round and round her finger, and the hat with it. Her hair had become loosened, and one thick roll fell down the side of her neck, reaching below her waist. It was beautiful hair, a rich brown. She stood very near to Philip Kingsford, but with her face turned

from him. He took the tress up in his hand, held it for half a minute, then bowed his head low, and pressed his lips to it. Then he sprang to his feet, as if the touch had burnt him and caused him a sharp pain. Willie started round, wondering what had happened, and she saw her father standing at the end of the gallery, by the door that led into the drawing-room. He stood like one transfixed. Philip Kingsford turned mortally pale; their eyes met; then Willie broke the spell.

"How you made me jump, Philip! I thought something must have stung you to make you start so; and papa looks in a state of consternation. Has anything happened?" she asked, beginning to be alarmed at their silence.

"Nothing, dear," replied her father, at last. He was the first to regain his senses. "What could happen likely to alarm you?"

"I don't know," she replied; "you both look so odd. I must go down to the hollow again," she added: "I forgot Snow."

And, without waiting for any further remark, she ran across the lawn in search of her favourite.

"Thorpe, as I kissed the lips of my mother when she lay dead, so, with the same reverence

and pure devotion, did I, in a moment when my self-command left me, kiss that child's hair. You believe me, do you not?"

He asked the question in a stern tone, as if he could bear no trifling, no suspicion to be cast on the truth of his words.

"I believe you, Phil, as I would believe the child's mother if she could stand before me now and speak to me."

"Thank you, Thorpe, thank you!"

"Did you tell her what you had heard yesterday?" asked William Thorpe, after a pause.

"No, we had no talk at all beyond her telling me she was willing to go, and that you and she had 'made it up,' as she called it."

"Then go after her now; best she should know all. You will tell it to her gently; others may not care whether they wound or not."

So Philip Kingsford went forth on his errand, not a pleasant one for any man, but to him especially painful. However, with it all there arose a feeling amounting almost to joy in his breast, a feeling he was ashamed to acknowledge, that she was henceforth and for ever separated from Cyril Treherne, and that she was going with her own consent to where *his* duty took him; and that events he

could neither further nor prevent had brought about this state of affairs. His thoughts had been so deep that he was close to her before he saw her; indeed, he would not be likely to see her, unless his eyes had been directed to the centre of a great holly-bush, where she seemed to have got in, but apparently met with some difficulty in endeavouring to get out again. In her right hand she held Snow perched on her forefinger; with her left she was doing her best to free the long brown hair—which had for a moment so completely turned Major Kingsford's head—from the prickly leaves in which it was hopelessly entangled. She saw Philip coming with a feeling of real relief.

"Do help me," she said, half fretfully; "this stupid bird got into the very middle of this holly, and nothing I could say would bring him out. I was obliged to push in myself, and didn't know my hair was loose."

"I will do the best I can," said the major, at once pushing back the branches right and left, and then tenderly—ah, so tenderly!—handling that luxurious mass of brown hair, untwining it as he best could; and with all his gentleness she would cry out every now and then; and then he would stop in despair at ever freeing her, at any rate without hurting her.

"Cut it, do!" she said at last. "How could I have been so stupid!"

"Indeed, I do not know," rejoined her companion; "but as to cutting it, I won't do that. Just have a little more patience, and I shall get it all out."

He had patience, at any rate; and, indeed, seemed more dilatory than necessary over the process, tarrying over each hair as it slowly yielded to his dexterous, skilful handling with a lingering tenderness of which Willie was utterly unconscious.

"There!" he exclaimed, when his task was done. "Go! you are free!"

There was something strangely hollow in the tone of his voice as he told her this, in slow and measured accents.

She waited for no second bidding, but passed out by the open space he had made in order to reach her, with the owl, its queer, sleepy eyes blinking steadily, and looking utterly indifferent to the whole proceeding, seemingly not caring whether he had been left there or rescued from the jealous anger of his fellow-birds, had they discovered him in his hiding-place.

"How can you like such a dull, heavy, senseless-looking thing?" asked Philip, as she

put the bird up close to her cheek, and rubbed his soft white plumage against it.

"I don't know," she answered, listlessly. "Perhaps because he cares for no one and knows no one but me."

"And would that single virtue gain your love, Willie? Would you love any one simply and solely because he loved you?" asked Philip, looking down at her with earnest eyes.

"Not a man, of course; but an animal I should, I think."

"Ah!" And he sighed a deep, heavy sigh. "Will you take that creature in, and come back here?" he said, after a minute's pause. "I want to speak to you for a few moments."

"Yes," she replied, not seeming to think anything of his request. They had so often, of late, had those few moments' private talk, that there was nothing in the proposal now to create fear or hope.

So she went with Snow to her room, and having deposited him on his perch, she returned to the garden, where the major was walking up and down, lost in day-dreams—not happy ones, but gloomy and lowering.

CHAPTER X.

"'Guard well thy thought—
Our thoughts are heard in heaven.'"

It was Willie spoke.

Philip Kingsford started, not only at her voice, but at her words. He turned round quickly, and said,—

"Very good advice, Willie; but Young had more command over himself than I have, if he never thought a thought but what was pure enough to be heard in heaven; but in all times, and in his as well as in all others, it has been found easy to preach what is often hard to practise."

"Were your thoughts so very bad then, Philip?" asked Willie, with a faint smile.

"They were about you; so I do not think they could be very bad. But, child, let me tell you what I asked you to come back and

hear," he continued. "You guess to what it refers, I suppose?"

He would have shirked his task now had he been able. He so dreaded seeing her sorrow and grieve for one he thought so utterly worthless.

"Not in the least," she replied. "And I am not clever at guessing anything."

"It is about Treherne." Kingsford's voice sounded harsh.

Willie started, and her cheek became very pale. She made no reply, but bent her head in recognition of his words.

"He is expected back very shortly." Philip paused, but Willie never spoke. "His yacht was at Oporto the day before yesterday, according to a telegram received at the club, and was to start homewards to-day." Another long pause.

"Do you know anything more?" at length said Willie, her voice husky and thick, and her fingers nervously playing with a piece of long grass, which she was twisting round and round them.

"Not much."

"Little or much, tell it me."

"The girl's father has been to Treherne Court—"

"Well, what of that? *That* proves nothing!"

"I was going to add, that he told Admiral Treherne he knew she was with his son."

Philip spoke very gently. He did not heed the angry tone in which Willie had interrupted him. He knew how every word he spoke was lacerating her poor heart, and he felt for her.

"When do you leave?" she asked, more gently now.

"This day fortnight."

"And do we go with you?"

"You consented to do so."

"Yes, I know; but we are going on the same—the very same day?"

"I should like it."

"Won't it be—rather—is it not—a long time off?—may not he—be back before that?"

Her broken sentences and hesitation made Philip understand the difficulty she had in framing her question. He knew what she meant to infer as well as if she had said plainly, "Shall I not run the chance of meeting him if we do not leave sooner?"

"Hardly. At any rate we can guard against such an occurrence."

"Philip, I must see Mrs. Treherne before I go. Will you tell papa this?—and the sooner I do so the better."

"Do you think that wise?" asked Philip, who would have spared her all the hidden tumult and heart-ache it would occasion her to see again the scenes where the happiest hours of her life had been spent; and, perhaps, too, he had an inward but unacknowledged dread that the mother might defend and clear the son's character sufficiently for Willie to relent and forgive whatever injury might have been done her.

"Wise or not, I must go. It is due to her, to myself, to *him*."

"Good God, what can be due to him!" exclaimed Philip, with ill-suppressed anger.

"Oh, Philip, do not speak so. Have we not all of us done wrong in our lives?—and we do not yet know all the truth."

"No; but I fancy the more we know the worse it will seem. True, we have all done wrong; but there is wrong and wrong, and wronging others is the worst kind. But, if you can make excuses for him, I surely need not condemn him."

"I am not making excuses," cried Willie; "but we cannot control our affections, can we? He cannot help ceasing to care for me, any more than I can help liking or disliking certain people."

"No; that is true enough." Her words struck home to himself, and he felt the force of them.

What a misfortune it is that our hearts are so completely past our own guidance, that we can no more direct the affections than we can regulate the flight of a bird! It goes whither it likes; and so do our likings, which are as often drawn towards a foe as a friend. We may exert a power over the mind, and regulate it according to our will, forcing it into a right direction, and can even at times "rase out the written troubles of the brain"; but the heart will bear no curb, it will rebel against coercion. You can neither stamp an image on it, nor obliterate the faintest impression; it takes in and gives out affection recklessly and unmindful of results. Experience never taught it anything, and so it will be on to the end.

Willie Thorpe, however, never even tried to crush out her love for Cyril Treherne: she would have resented such an idea had it been proposed. Her notion was that, were she to live to that much-dreaded age of eighty, the little river she watched so often would sooner change its course and leap backwards than her heart would alter or even waver in its steadfastness. She thought her life wrecked, and that

she and happiness could never more know each other; but beyond grieving over this immutable fact she never gave thought to rising out of it. How was it possible ever to love another man? Having once loved,—and still loving Cyril, it was, perhaps, not probable that such a matter-of-fact, commonplace idea should strike her as it did—and hopefully too—both her father and friend. Willie had often heard that people died from a broken heart, and she fervently wished she might do the same; yet there was an inward conviction that it was not a likely event. Her health had not suffered for all the months' misery she had endured; and though, it is true, the full extent of her sorrow had not been of so long duration—it might be counted by weeks—still surely there would have been something more visible than the mere fading of colour in her cheeks and gaiety in her voice.

Now that it was decided they were to go she longed with a deep intense longing for the time to come. The days did seem to flit by more rapidly, owing to her having some occupation for both mind and body. She had to put away her own particular household gods; she had to think what to take and what to leave; she had a visit to pay and a letter to

write that gave her thought—especially the latter, it seemed the most difficult, the most painful of all, and, moreover, had to be done before she paid the visit, for she intended giving it into Mrs. Treherne's hands herself. Then, besides all this, there was a necessary amount of leave-taking from immediate friends; and that, too, was a dreaded obligation, for people would ask questions hard to answer under the circumstances, and that she would feel to be prying and inquisitive, though they might be commonplace enough.

To Lady St. Aubyn Willie herself told the truth. She knew her kindness of heart and her affection for herself would make her deal with the matter in the right way should it ever be mooted or discussed in her absence; and moreover she thought—she hoped—it might thus indirectly reach Cyril's ears that she did not cast any blame on him—he could not help his love waning, and also that he need not reproach himself, for he was under no actual promise.

Lady St. Aubyn, however, seemed utterly opposed to this reasoning, and pointed out to her—as no one else had done, for the best reason that there was no one belonging to her who could—that his conduct was dishonour-

able and insulting to herself, besides the falsehood of the whole affair.

"Don't speak so harshly of him, dear Lady St. Aubyn," said Willie, pleadingly; "he could not help it, I am sure of that."

"Could not help it! My dearest Willie, a man *must* help doing that which casts a stain on his character; and, besides, a gentleman has his good name to shield. Depend on it, no man breathing who could sully either is worthy of the affection of the most commonplace woman alive; for, be she who or what she may, yet capable of love, she would still be too good for him. You must shake off this foolish notion that you care on to the end for Cyril, if he be as worthless as rumour makes him out. But I confess I have my doubts as to the whole truth of the matter; there may be, and I dare say is, some foundation for scandalmongers to build on, but I cannot believe that Cyril, with all his faults, could stoop so low and act so discreditably. After all, as far as I have heard, the whole story has originated in that vile, canting methodist, Snape."

"*Her* father went to Treherne and told the admiral she—she was with his son."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes; I know that to be true, because Philip Kingsford told me."

"But who told him, my dear?"

"I do not know: I did not ask him?"

"Well, a little time will prove everything. In the meanwhile perhaps you are right in going away; at any rate you will spare yourself a certain amount of annoyance."

"Oh, Lady St. Aubyn, I could die happily if I thought he cared even a little for me still!"

"Stuff and nonsense, child! What good, pray, would his caring for you do, if you were to die? Why did you never talk to me before on this matter?"

"I did not like doing so."

"I would have sifted these rumours myself had you asked me. Charley did one day beg me to go and ask Mrs. Treherne some point-blank questions; but the idea was too absurd. I had no earthly right to take such a step, and no excuse, though my nephew, Frank Delafield, coined plenty for me; you can guess what kind they were; but I could and would, had you asked me."

"I dreaded hearing it to be true; for at first I could not bring myself to doubt him: it was not till Harriet Henderson told me she knew it, and Philip Kingsford that he believed it, that

I could no longer help thinking it was so. But, Lady St. Aubyn, if he should ever speak to you on the subject, tell him, will you, I do not blame him—"

Here poor Willie broke down, and, no longer able to control her grief, the tears welled up and flowed freely and uninterruptedly. Lady St. Aubyn thought it would do her good, and relieve her; but presently, and when she was a little calmer, she said.—

"I shall do nothing of the sort, Willie. If he be as black as he is painted, believe me such pure unselfish love as yours would be thrown away on him. He must be heartless and undeserving of good in any shape or form."

"Shall you see him, do you think, when he returns?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

"Will you write to me, and tell me, if he says anything to you?"

"I will. In any case, dear child, I will write to you. I cannot tell you how I grieve at this blight over your young life. It is a sad and heavy cloud to have broken over you so early; all seemed so hopeful and bright for you."

"Yes," she replied, "too hopeful, too bright,

to last! I do not think happiness is intended for us in this world. Every one seems to have trouble and sorrow."

"Nothing of the sort, my dear. As a rule, we hold the chances in our hand, and generally make the choice ourselves of that which brings us trouble; but as to the theory that we are 'born to trouble' I think David simply contradicted himself, as he was rather apt to do, for *he* had a good share of the comforts and enjoyments of life; at any rate, individually the statement was scarcely applicable." Willie made a poor attempt at a smile. "In any case at your age it is folly to talk so; you must shake off those morbid feelings, and for that reason I do not regret your going. Change of scene is the best remedy for a heavy heart."

Almost unconsciously to herself, Willie let hope spring up afresh in her breast as Lady St. Aubyn expressed doubts concerning Cyril's conduct. Still she went on with her prescribed line of conduct, though with less of utter blankness than before. There were now but five days before they were to start for London, and there was much to do in that time; but most important of all was her letter. She had already spent three nights, sitting up till past twelve, endeavouring to write something that would

make Cyril understand she gave him up for his own sake, and that she threw no blame on him. In short, all she had written proved too affectionate or too cold to please her; and then one was too long, another not long enough. However, she had written a line to Mrs. Treherne, saying she hoped to find her at home the following afternoon, as she was desirous of seeing her, to wish her good-bye before leaving Yardley Wood; so this night the letter must be written, and, whether she pleased herself or not, something must be done. Twelve struck, and then the first hour of the new day, before the letter was completed. She read it, and re-read it, and then finally placed it under her pillow unclosed, to read over again the next morning. It seemed to read better then, though she longed so to have poured forth the bitterness and love with which her heart was bursting, that it did not seem truthful or honest enough; and yet it said nothing untrue, if not all the truth. Then for the last time she read it half aloud, the better to judge how it sounded,—

"My dear Cyril,—I wish so much to save you all pain that I have made up my mind to write this letter to you. Of course I have

heard everything, and I am very, very unhappy. Still I am sure you are not so much in the wrong as people say, and I dare say you could not help it all, and please do not think I blame you. But I know it will be better for us not to meet again, or at any rate for some years, and so I am going with papa abroad. Good-bye, dear Cyril, may God bless you, and may you be as happy as I wish you to be.

"WILLIE THORPE."

"My darling! my darling!" she exclaimed, with her hands clasped and the tears trickling down her cheeks, "Oh, if I could see you before I left—if I could! And yet I write with my own hands, telling you it will be better for us not to meet for years! How hard it is to bear! how dreadful to think that perhaps I may never, never see his dear face again; his beautiful, fair, curling hair; his loving blue eyes, that used to seem so full of love when he talked to me! Oh, Cyril! my darling! my love! is it possible we are parted for ever!"

Like Correggio's recumbent Magdalene lay poor, forlorn little Willie on her bed, her long brown hair streaming over her fair shoulders, the letter open before her, blotted with big tears, careless of the advancing day,—one

thought, one being, filling up her whole existence.

"At any rate," she argued, "it is some comfort to know I may love him still,—no one can grudge me that fruitless pleasure; and I can keep my promise to him. How is it possible he does not care for me any more? It is not so very, very long ago since he said,—oh, how well I remember his words!—he could kill any man whose lips pressed mine as his had done. He must have loved me *then* and can we love at one moment and not at another? Love with me is, like eternity, never ending."

Longer still did she lie, going over past hours, happy, blissful moments, till at last the nine o'clock bell rang. The lateness of the hour startled her into activity; she hastened over her toilet as much as she could, and then, before joining her father, she went into her boudoir and sealed up her letter to Cyril. That done she seemed more calm, more satisfied, and placing it in her trinket-box, and locking it up, she went down to breakfast.

Though William Thorpe and his daughter had "made it up," the question at issue between them had been dissolved by circumstances over which neither had had any control, and the old affectionate, familiar state of things was

not restored, and never would be. There was on his part a reticence on the common every-day occurrences that had hitherto formed the interest of their mutual lives, arising from an indifference on hers to all unconnected with the one object. They ceased to have any one point in common; a sort of jealous feeling existed that what the one liked the other must naturally be suspicious of. Still Willie was not so silent as she had been: she entered into conversation with less listlessness, and tried her best to conceal her want of interest in matters which she knew she should concern herself about.

Her father was aware of her determination to go over to Treherne Court, and, though he disapproved of it, he did not like to forbid it. Something like Philip Kingsford, he had a misgiving that perhaps Cyril Treherne, like the devil, might not be so black as he was painted, and the thought she might make that discovery —without any right or just cause—vexed him extremely. For all poor Willie's sorrow, her father would not have liked such a colouring to come over the affair after its having terminated as it had. In his heart he never liked Treherne; perhaps there was no man—save one, and that one seemed impossible—to whom he

would have given his only child with the smallest degree of satisfaction, or whom, if he consented, he could have liked; the very fact of taking her away from him would give rise to a disagreeable feeling towards the one who did so.

"Papa, I should like to drive over to Treherne in the pony-carriage; you will not want it, I suppose?" said Willie, when breakfast was nearly over.

"Oh, no; I will drive you over there with pleasure," replied her father. "At what time would you like to start?"

Willie hesitated a moment, and then she said, "I would rather you did not come, papa: you do not mind, do you?"

"Yes, Willie, I do; I mind very much," replied Mr. Thorpe, slowly, "very much indeed. I do not think it would be right or proper, all things considered, for you to go there without me."

"Surely there is no harm in my going to see an old lady without you accompanying me," said Willie, rising, and going up to the window with her hand full of crumbs of bread, which she threw out to the birds, and they came down from the branches of the great elm tree that stood near that side of the house,

picking them up so rapidly that in a few moments all were eaten or carried away. "I can drive myself, and Mansell go with me; or I can ride, if you prefer it."

"Ride or drive as you like, it will make no difference: only you must not go alone. Indeed, though I have not told you so before, I do not like your going there at all. When you consider your position, it is a marvel to me how you can contemplate such a visit."

"Why, what have I done?" asked the girl, impatiently, and tapping the window with the tips of her fingers.

"I did not say you had done anything," answered her father, calmly; "your position, I said, was such as to make a visit to Treherne Court doubtful policy. Supposing Mrs. Treherne said 'Not at home' to you?"

"Papa, how can you talk so! My going has nothing to do with policy. You know Mrs. Treherne would not say she was out if she were in. And why should she be less glad to see me than she has always been? It is true I have not been over there as often as I ought, but I can explain the reason why. But I think you hate the Trehernes, papa, for you would make them out all bad!"

"You have no right to say so, Willie. When I thought it was for your happiness I sacrificed my own feelings to—"

"Yes, that's just it! You *didn't* like Cyril, and so you were glad when you thought he had done something to separate us, and you brought it about by driving him away!"

"Well, Willie, I will not argue with you in your present humour," said William Thorpe, wiping his lips after having swallowed his last mouthful of tea, and getting up from the breakfast-table; "there is no use, it only seems to increase the ill-feeling which I was hoping had been extinguished."

"You are right, papa; it is best for us not to touch on that subject. I cannot help saying things I am sorry for afterwards."

Then after a pause her father said, "What time do you wish to go from here? Remember the days are not very long yet: it will not do to start late."

"Three o'clock, I suppose."

"Very well."

And Mr. Thorpe left the room by one door, and Willie by another.

"Why won't papa ever do what I like!" thought Willie, as she went up to her sanctum, her dog, her owl, and her meditations. "He

treats me little better than he did when I was ten years old. I cannot even go and pay poor old Mrs. Treherne a visit without his going with me! I wonder if he is afraid of anything or—anybody; or of my hearing or seeing what he would not like? See Mrs. Treherne I must and will; on that point I am quite determined. The idea of my giving her that letter or speaking a word to her about *him* before any one!"

There were several hours to dispose of before three o'clock came round, and Willie tried various methods of getting through it without dwelling too much on the longed-for and yet dreaded visit; but it was difficult. She took up a book and found herself reading the same page over and over again, without knowing a word of its meaning. She made Dust's toilet, a treat he rarely enjoyed in these present times; but that over she found but little advance had been made by the clock. Then she took her poor, dull, stupid owl, and endeavoured to rouse him up a bit; but that was an utter failure, and was given up very quickly. At last she bethought herself of writing a letter to one of her old playmates living at Dresden; and that had, to a certain extent, the desired effect, and occupied her mind; but her inge-

nuity was hardly taxed when she found herself endeavouring to cover two or three pages of letter paper with matter concerning herself and yet in no way allude to the bright light that for a time illumined her existence, and which, now that it was gone, left it so dark and drear.

It was almost as difficult as for a man to live two separate lives, wear two faces, have two interests, and never to let the one know of the existence of the other. It is difficult, so difficult that at times the tongue lets slip a word that makes the keen eyes and quick ears of those we would desire to be both blind and deaf on the occasion start with suspicious surprise; yet it *can* be done, *is* done, too frequently.

Willie, with her pen, which in spite of herself at moments betrayed her secret, was able to scratch out the tell-tale words and write something else over them.

What a pity we cannot obliterate our spoken words as well and as easily! What heartaches, what quarrels, what jealousies, what mischief we might obviate! But spoken words are something like printed ones; the former are as difficult to expunge from the memory as the latter are from the eye. It is a good piece of

advice, but difficult to follow—to believe nothing you hear, and only half what you see.

The work Willie set herself, however, enabled her to get through the long morning; and, though the fate of the letter on the following day was to be torn up and thrown into the waste-paper basket, it had answered the purpose for which she wrote it.

It struck two as she closed her blotting-book; there was luncheon yet to be gone through, and then to get ready, so that she had not much more time on hand than she actually required. There is no time hangs so heavily as that which we endeavour to destroy for the mere sake of its passing.

CHAPTER XI.

The afternoon was bright and sunny, a clear blue sky overhead, and a fresh breeze blowing off the sea. It was an afternoon to do any one good, to brace and cheer him, and to make him look leniently on the evil side of human nature, and over-generously on the good—to make him feel contented with life generally, and himself in particular.

This influence, occasioned by the weather, was needed to render the *tête-à-tête* drive of William Thorpe and his daughter commonly endurable, for both felt aggrieved, each thought the other to blame, and neither cared to own wrong on his or her side.

"What a delicious day!" remarked the father, at last, as he let the ponies walk up one of the many hills they had to ascend along the road to Treherne Court.

"Yes; and how glorious it must be for those at sea—who are not sick!" replied the daughter, who, as usual, had but the one root from whence sprang all her thoughts and ideas, branch out as they might, and often did. "I hope we shall have a calm day for crossing," she added, presently.

"I do not think it is ever calm between Dover and Calais," was the comforting reply her remark called forth; and then the conversation lagged, till, on reaching the top of the hill, the ponies were allowed to have their heads and to tear down at a rattling pace. Willie begged her father not to go so fast; she did not like it, and she feared some accident, either to the ponies, the carriage, or themselves. Mr. Thorpe drew them up gently, and but just in time, for, as he got them well in hand, a boy ran across the road, and must have been run over had the driver not been able, with a sudden jerk, to throw them back on their haunches, and so the child escaped with nothing more severe than a kick, which knocked him down, but sent him a couple of feet away from the carriage-wheels.

"Confound you! What do you mean by running under the horses' heads like that? Couldn't you see the carriage coming?"

"In course I could; but I thought I should have been quicker than they. I was in a hurry, you see"; and the boy put his grubby hands up to his grubby eyes, and began rubbing them, making a good pretence of crying.

"Are you hurt?" asked Willie, standing up and looking at the boy.

"Well, I might a been, mightn't I?"

"Where were you going in such a hurry?"

"I was a-goin' for old mother Cheadles, the lady what keeps the Rising Sun, on particklar business, and it be *very* particklar!"

"Then don't lose any more time chattering there; be off with you!" said Mr. Thorpe.

"Give him something, papa," asked Willie.

"If I do, Willie," was the reply, "depend upon it that boy will end by being run over and killed; he will think it a paying amusement, and will be running under every horse's feet that is drawing a decent carriage; however, there is sixpence for him. There, boy, take that and begone; and don't try those tricks again!"

The child pulled his dusty hair in token of thanks. He had had his cap knocked off, and it lay now under the pony-carriage; he picked

it up as it drove on, and stood for a moment gazing wistfully after it.

"I wish'd I'd 'ave been born rich! How lucky that gent is, and that young 'oman by his side! He's ne'er a thing to do but shove his arm into 'is pocket and 'aul up a 'eap of money! I wonder why 'e's born rich and I ain't!"

And without giving any further thought to that puzzling question he climbed over the stile, with the sixpence for the moment held between his teeth; then, when over, he put it into a greasy pocket in his little coat, and went on his way, thinking of all he would do with it, as happy and contented as if he had been born heir to a throne.

"'Old Mother Cheadles, the lady of the Rising Sun'! what a confusion of distinctions," said Willie. "I wonder where the 'lady's' Rising Sun gives light!"

Mr. Thorpe made no answer. He wondered too, but not as to anything connected with Mrs. Cheadle or her whereabouts; he knew all about that well enough; he had been there and seen the "lady" and the Rising Sun also, and painful reflections did they bring forth. It was an unlucky memory to awaken, considering the visit he and his daughter were

about to pay. It recalled all the bitterness of feeling he first experienced when, by Snape's aid, he had learnt of Treherne having taken Cherry Mason to Mrs. Cheadle's little inn. He felt a gross insult had been offered his child, and he could not do otherwise than resent it. Willie took no notice of her father's silence; after all, she had merely made a half-questioning remark, and not one that required an answer. She went on,—

"You will not send the horses away to graze, will you, papa?"

"No, I think it spoils them; they become so rough, and look so uncared for. They will be best at Yardley Wood; they can be turned out to grass there for a day or two now and then. Mansell likes to have them under his own eye. Horses cared for as are ours cannot rough it as others might."

"Poor Peri! I shall be sorry to leave her. How long, papa, do you think we shall be away?"

This was the first time Willie had in any way alluded to their return. Her father looked up, and said,—

"That entirely depends on you, Willie."

The young girl said no more. If it depended on her, then she must be guided by events,

Perhaps "never," she thought to herself. There was no more talking till they reached the finely arched ivy-clad gateway of Treherne. The old man came out from the lodge as soon as he heard "G-a-te!" shouted out; and, with his trembling hands and huge rheumatic knuckles, let in the pony-carriage. He knew the Thorpes, and, like all the rest in the surroundings, had heard that pretty Miss Thorpe was to be the future mistress of the Court; so it was always with a smile of approbation that she was welcomed at the lodge, and a cheery "Good day to ye, miss!" But Willie's response was but a *triste* one: she no sooner found herself within the radius of Cyril's home, within sight of the shrubberies where she had strolled with him, of the beautiful broad terrace-walk where she had vowed nothing could ever change her love, to be true to him for ever, than a host of recollections crowded her brain, making her forget all else but him whom she loved so dearly yet so unwisely.

They were soon at the house now. The long avenue of elms was passed before Willie had had time to shake off the thoughts that half bewildered her.

"There are visitors," said Mr. Thorpe, as he saw a carriage drawn up on one side in the

shade, with the coachman enjoying a comfortable siesta.

"That is the Hendersons' carriage," said Willie. "How sorry I am they are here!"

That was a first thought; then came second thoughts, which altered the phase of matters. Was it not better, after all, that they should be there? Their own visit would be less awkward, and conversation be more easily kept up.

Jackson, the old butler, looked as glad to see Mr. and Miss Thorpe as did the old porter. He had begun to fear something was amiss; not seeing her pretty face for so long, and, now that he did see her, the change was so palpable it did not require more discerning eyes than his to notice it. He bowed his white head low, and then ushered them into the drawing-room. Willie went in first, followed by her father. At the first glance the room seemed quite full, and her inclination was to rush back and get away. She was not in a humour for company; she was on a mission the object of which was to cut asunder the chain that held her to the only prospect of happiness she thought she could ever have, and to send her adrift on the sea of life, to be tossed about and driven from wave to wave,

till death should release her from her miserable fate.

With such work before her, no wonder the poor girl felt bewildered when she saw what seemed to her ten or a dozen people assembled. However, on a nearer approach, she found the company consisted of almost all old friends. There were General Delafield, his son and daughter; Mrs. and Miss Henderson; and a stout, red-faced, bald-headed gentleman —no, not gentleman—man; we must omit the gentle—in black, with a white neck-tie, that she recognized in a moment as the man who addressed himself to Cyril at the school-feast at Stanmore, when they were playing croquet, and her heart beat fast, and her breath seemed thick and short, as if she must choke. That was all, except the master of the house and his wife.

There was a general move and shaking of hands, welcomes expressed, some laughing and a little kissing, and then all were seated once more. Willie was between Frank and Constance Delafield. Mr. Thorpe seemed to force room to be made for him in the vicinity of Mr. Snape, and that gentleman seemed quite as willing to have him near him.

"Why, Willie, what have you been doing

with yourself? Where are your rosy cheeks? Have you not been well, little one?" called out the admiral across the big ottoman that separated them, and which was occupied by Miss Harriet Henderson.

"We are a lazy old couple, dear," put in Mrs. Treherne, "or I should have been over to see you; and I really do believe, had I not had your note this morning, we should have driven over this afternoon,—it is so lovely, is it not?"

"I have wondered why we have not seen you," replied Willie.

"Now that is a good joke!" laughed out the admiral. "A young thing like you, and a young fellow like your father, with nothing to do, to wonder that a couple of old fogies like us do not scamper over the country to look you up!"

"It is so much nicer for young ladies to look pale and delicate that I suppose, Miss Thorpe, you have been doing what Conny has—sleeping with raw beefsteaks on both your cheeks."

"What do you mean, Frank!" cried out that young gentleman's sister: "how can you tell such stories! I never did such a nasty thing in my life, Willie!"

"Oh, Constance Delafield, where do you ex-

pect to go to when you die, if you tell such awful crammers!"

"I think, Mr. Delafield," said Miss Henderson, shocked most dreadfully at such an irreverent speech, "that it is very wrong of you to speak in that manner, and some terrible punishment may fall on you if you do not pray to avert it."

"Do you do that for me, Miss Henderson; you're a saint and I'm a sinner, and the prayers of a righteous man—you know the rest. By the way they don't give us any account in the Bible of the women saints; isn't that rather a bad look-out for you?"

"Hold your tongue, Frank; and don't talk, boy, of what you do not understand," said the general.

"Do *you*, sir? If so, in pity to Miss Henderson explain."

"Miss Henderson is of the Lord, and as such shall inherit the kingdom of heaven!" said the Reverend Snape, in a solemn, deep, almost growly tone.

"Bravo, Snakes! Now that's what I call speaking up like a man! Well done, old—"

"My name is Snape, sir, not Snakes!"

"Is it true you are going away, Willie?" asked Constance Delafield, in an under-tone,

whilst the loud voices around she hoped would drown hers.

"Hush, Conny!" replied Willie, her eyes instantly falling on Harriet Henderson to see if she had overheard the question; but whether she had or not she could not tell, for her face was turned away towards her "dear Mr. Snape." "I'll tell you by-and-by, or to-morrow, if you can come over to Yardley Wood."

"Willie, have you seen Major Kingsford lately?" asked Mrs. Treherne, presently.

"He is going abroad," said Mrs. Henderson; "he has obtained a good appointment: and it is a very fortunate thing for him, for I hear he is dreadfully in debt."

"Did you?" said William Thorpe, slowly and distinctly; "then you may tell your informant, whoever he may be, that he has told you a falsehood, Mrs. Henderson."

Snape groaned audibly, and Miss Harriet seemed uncomfortable, for she began to fidget and to cough.

"Why, Phil Kingsford is very well off," said General Delafield, "I think it much more likely that people owe him money."

"He gives a jolly lot away," said Frank. "Thurston and Mayne, who know him well, say he keeps half the poor in Sedgeport."

"Not charity that, sir; mistaken altogether," said Mr. Snape. "Charity showeth itself best when placed in the power of those poor humble servants of our Lord, like myself. *We* can then dispense it judiciously and discreetly."

"And charity begins at home, doesn't it Sne—Mr. Snake?"

"Sir—I beg your pardon—I didn't quite catch—"

"Of no consequence, sir, no consequence," said the general, thinking he had better take off his unmanageable son before he said something worse, so he rose and bade his hostess good-bye.

"Don't go yet," she pleaded; "do wait and have some tea." She had not heard Frank's observation to Mr. Snape.

"I never take it, and Conny does not want it: I must go indeed. Good-bye, admiral."

"We will come to-morrow, Willie, if you like," said Constance, bidding her friend good-bye. "Papa, we can have the phaeton to drive over to Yardley Wood to-morrow?"

"Certainly."

"Come too, Delafield; and you and I can have a cigar whilst the young people are amusing themselves," said Mr. Thorpe.

"Good! If the weather be fine: that of course is understood."

"We are in for a spell of it, I think," said the admiral.

The farewells were made and the Delafields gone.

"A godless youth!" said Snape; and he shook his head.

"A very good-hearted, frank, truthful boy," said Admiral Treherne. "We cannot expect old heads on young shoulders, and could we put them there they would be horribly misplaced. I cannot bear to see a young man as demure and steady as his father might be."

"I heard, Mr. Thorpe, there was a talk of your leaving us," said Miss Henderson, taking advantage of a moment when Willie was talking to Mrs. Treherne on the relative advantages of gas and candles, Mrs. Treherne being very anxious to have gas brought up to the house, and the admiral being equally averse to it.

William Thorpe looked up at his daughter, but she had not heard the question, so he was not likely to get much help from her as to how he was to reply. The fact was he did not like the Trehernes to hear from others of their leaving; he thought, however wrongly their son had acted, it was due to them at any rate

to let them be the first to receive the information of their intended plans; and he was not prepared for others asking him anything about it. These thoughts passed very rapidly through his mind, but Miss Henderson seemed to think the answer was very long in coming, and was going to repeat her question, when Mr. Thorpe suddenly answered her question with another.

"How did you hear that, Miss Henderson? Who could have told you?"

"Oh, you know in the country things do get about. I can hardly tell you, really."

This was true, for she did not dare to own she had overheard Constance Delafield's question to Willie of the truth of the matter, and Willie's "Hush!" which was tantamount to admitting it.

Mr. Thorpe had now determined on his line of defence: he would evade and not admit the fact. After all, it was no business of the Hendersons—they were mere acquaintances, he owed them no especial consideration, and moreover he did not like them.

"Ah, yes; it is astonishing how a mere word will be turned and twisted and others added to it till it becomes a real sentence, and from that to quite a history. Now I heard the other day the most absurd rumour possible, yet

for all that it has left such an impression on me that I cannot quite bring myself to believe that there is absolutely no foundation for it."

"Dear me, what can it be?" asked Miss Henderson, her curiosity thoroughly roused, and her mind most completely diverted from the Thorpes' departure.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you," said William Thorpe; "and yet it so entirely concerns myself that I think I might without doing harm to any one. Can you keep a secret, Miss Henderson?"

"If you ask me to do so, I can."

"And will you?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, I will tell you. I heard that Mrs. Brereton was going to leave me all her money!"

"Good gracious! And Brereton Park, too?"

"Yes—the park, the plate, the jewels, all—everything!"

"But I thought she had a nephew."

"Yes, five, and two nieces. That is the worst of it—"

"My dear Harriet, we must be going; it is getting quite late."

"Yes," replied Miss Harriet, absently, for a

light had just broken in on her; she was surprised at her own short-sightedness. Why had she never turned her attentions to Mr. Thorpe? after all he would be a better match than "that dear Mr. Snape"; and he was not so old—not so old as Snape by a long way—he had the youth of aristocracy; and if he had a daughter, well, what did that signify?—she would marry. And fancy being the mistress of, not only Yardley Wood, but Brereton Park! the most magnificent park in all Cornwall, and just on the borders of Devonshire.

"Well, Mr. Thorpe, no one will wish you joy more sincerely than myself," she said, turning round to him, and speaking in a semi-mysterious manner. "You may trust me; I will keep your secret."

Just as they were all standing up to take leave of the Hendersons, Jackson, the old butler, appeared, and said,—

"Mr. Snape is wanted, madam; a person is waiting to see him."

"A person waiting to see me; but that is nothing extraordinary! Is any one *in extremis*, and requiring the consolations of religion? My dear madam, I beg your pardon, I beg a thousand pardons, but I did not—"

"Oh, pray make no apologies, it is quite

unnecessary," remarked Mrs. Treherne. "Who is it, Jackson?"

"It's a dirty little boy, madam."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

"Not exactly, madam; he said he had been sent up here by Mrs. Rosam. But some one else had sent him there; in fact, madam, I did not pay very much attention to what he did say."

"Oh, I shall hear in a moment: no doubt some help is wanted: we are infested with poor about here; it's quite dreadful. And, dear ladies, can you understand how painful it is to me, when I hear the piteous tales that are so constantly poured into my ear, not to be able to relieve the wants of sometimes poor starving children, children that our Lord loved so much, and of whom He said that giving a glass of water even to them was the same as giving it to Himself." Mr. Snape's voice trembled, and his eyes and right hand were directed upwards. "Oh, my Christian brethren, if you saw one-third of the misery it is my lot to witness, if you saw the sunken cheeks and hollow eyes from want of food—food, think of that!—you would give out of your stores—give! aye, that you would, freely, liberally, munificently!"

"Here, Mr. Snape, here is something to help

this present case with, whatever it may be or whoever, man, woman, or child," said Willie, going up to him and slipping two sovereigns into his fat hand, which grasped them as if it hungered in the way he had described his parishioners to do.

"The Lord will restore it to you four-fold, young lady—"

"Here, Mr. Snape, I give you the little I can afford freely and with pleasure"; and Miss Harriet handed him half a sovereign. Mrs. Henderson gave a pound, Mrs. Treherne two, and Mr. Thorpe two.

"See now, Miss Thorpe, the blessed fruits of a good example. A woman without charity is a river without water, a legacy without money, a garden without flowers, a tree without fruit—"

"Well, you 've got a good haul this time, Snapes—enough without my adding to it," said the admiral. "I hope whoever it may be that has sent for you will benefit by these ladies' generosity."

"I will dispose of it as my conscience directs. I seldom, in choosing the recipients of my charity—"

"If you please, sir," said Jackson, reappearing; "the boy says he cannot wait, and that

Mrs. Cheadle—that 's the person who sent him —will be very angry, and that—"

"Well, well, I 'm coming. I wish you good day, ladies and gentlemen, good day; and may the Lord reward you according to your works!"

"Papa, that is the boy we nearly ran over!" exclaimed Willie, whilst Mr. Snape was delivering his blessing.

"Yes, I think it must be."

"Won't you go and see?"

"What is the use? He is all right, or he could not be here."

Mr. Thorpe rather preferred ignorance in all that was connected with the boy. The name of Cheadle annoyed him, and he did not wish to put himself in the way of hearing anything about her or any one belonging to her.

So Snape and the young messenger departed together, slightly to the relief of all but Mrs. Henderson; and it would seem as if she could contentedly have passed the evening of her life without interruption or change in the society of that most weightily sanctimonious and self-righteous Methodist. There is no accounting for tastes, so no excuse need be offered for that lady's strange infatuation. It might be his

overpowering goodness had conquered her; it could not well be his comely figure or red, shiny, fat face, or his podgy hands, or his nubbly-looking feet, and yet it might be one, or perhaps all combined, there was no knowing; all that was perfectly obvious was the fact, the woman saw the man that he was good, and it pleased her accordingly. She had sat down again after he left, as if forgetful that she had been going also, and was silent. There was no use in wasting her good words amongst that unholy quartette, for she included Mrs. Treherne. That lady had sunk terribly in her estimation since one or two of her shortcomings, arising out of her giving in to her son's irreligious views, had come to her knowledge. Mrs. Henderson was always able to learn any little gossip connected with the inner and private life at Treherne Court from her servant James, whose saintly ideas, imbibed from his mistress and *her* Mentor, admitted of any prying into other people's affairs. "It was for the good of their souls," said both mistress and man, in extenuation of what sometimes an honest friend or a fellow-servant ventured to call "unpardonable inquisitiveness."

Miss Harriet had got hold of Mr. Thorpe

again, and the admiral sat quietly listening to the lesson she was giving him in good works, and wishing the pious mother and daughter would take their departure; but he felt sure now they would do nothing of the kind till they had had some tea and bread-and-butter, and he ventured to suggest to his wife, that this reviving refreshment should be immediately ordered.

When the bell was rung and the order given, Mrs. Treherne, who had been talking for the last minute or so in a low voice to Willie, now said aloud,—

"Come, my dear, and let me show you that little book I told you about. I am sure you will like it; and, if you do, you shall take it home with you."

The last words were barely audible, as Mrs. Treherne, suiting her actions to her words, was passing out of the room with Willie, and was closing the door as she uttered the last words.

"Don't be long, Willie," cried her father after her, but she did not hear him.

"What deceit!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson; fortunately it was inwardly spoken. "It's not to show her any book, I could swear to it!"

"Going to talk about Mr. Cyril Treherne, I suppose," said Miss Harriet to Mr. Thorpe, in a tone that showed a feeling was at work within her—a mixture of jealousy and envy.

"Perhaps so," was Mr. Thorpe's rejoinder, somewhat coldly spoken, and then he turned and conversed with the admiral.

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. Treherne had become, as Mrs. Henderson had to a certain extent found out, very much changed of late. The world had not used her so kindly as it might, and she was beginning at last, though much too late for her own good, to find out that you cannot trust every one; that people take delight in being ill natured; that evil predominates over good, that falsehood is more universal than truth; and, in fact, was making the discovery we all do sooner or later, that society is hollow, and pure friendship as rare as warm weather in May. And this discovery, as is invariably the case, did not make the woman a better woman. She began to doubt and suspect, and to find out that very often professions of friendship were like blind windows, only for show and of no use, and, if you put your trust in them and

test them, their emptiness and falsity would soon become apparent.

And the kind-hearted, blunt old admiral, when he heard his wife beginning to groan over the mutability of human nature in general and the hollowness of the Sandcombe world in particular, would only blurt out a sweeping remark that "the world generally was rotten," and that "no sensible person ever thought of placing any faith in it."

Which remarks helped to nourish the young plant of mistrust that had taken root in her breast. No greater cause for this change existed than the finding out by mere accident of some mean, paltry actions of a "pious" neighbour; trifles truly, but such Mrs. Treherne thought sinful in one who pretended to be so religious and good, and who talked so well, but carried out his instructions so badly. She wondered how it was she had never found out all these shortcomings in people before, if the world had always been the same. She could not quite believe it was; and even now she did not condemn all because of the few—only those she had actually found out came under her censure; but she doubted more frequently, and was suspicious without just cause.

And all this had for its foundation her son's

conduct. The reports that had reached others at length came to the ears of his father and mother; and those from whom she had every right to expect sympathy and kindness, and even support in denying the story till, at any rate, it had been proved, she found to be among those who whispered it about with pretended pity and in a regretful tone, which at once led their listeners to think they believed it and indeed knew it as a fact. And, once the eyes open, how quickly they see everything. Mrs. Treherne no sooner found out one scandal-monger, and convicted her of it, than she looked for others, and discovered their name to be legion. She longed to write a letter to the county paper—women are so fond of writing—and state that falsehoods were being propagated which every right-thinking person should help in suppressing, and that it was cowardly to attack the absent. But the admiral, wiser in his manhood, stopped that method of clearing his son.

"Wait till his return,—he can then speak for himself; besides, my dear, we know nothing about it. Supposing, mind you I only say *supposing*, it were true, had we not better leave it alone? By talking we should make matters worse."

And so it rested; but the poor mother suffered, and did not dare to go near the Thorpes'; and the longer the Thorpes were in calling at Treherne, the more impossible became a visit to Yardley Wood.

But till that afternoon, when Willie was shut up with her alone in her boudoir, Mrs. Treherne never knew to what extent the scandal-mongers had gone. Then by degrees the poor child poured forth all her sorrow, and relieved herself of a great burden. It was a different confidence to what she had given to Lady St. Aubyn, for she was here met at every stage of the statement with,

"It is *not* true! it *cannot* be true! I know how Cyril loved you; and he could not act as people say, that being so!"

"Have you never seen the father of—of—"

"This girl? Yes, I have; I have seen him twice. I will tell you all about it. He came the first time when Cyril was at home—the very day after you had left, I think it was. I know, however, he was leaving the next day or the day after. He came and asked to see me. I saw him, of course, and the poor man was in great distress, for his daughter had left him, and he thought Cyril knew where she was; and Cyril saw him, and, of course, con-

vinced him he knew nothing about her. Then he came again, about six weeks or two months ago, and told me his daughter had left him again. So it was clear she must have returned from her first absence, and left a second time when Cyril was not even in England. Why, it is simply absurd to make my poor boy responsible for the foolish, almost mad, actions of a girl that he never heard of and never saw till her father took him into his cottage the night the Marguerita was wrecked."

"Oh, Mrs. Treherne, if I could but believe it! But you know how good and truthful Philip Kingsford is, and he told me it was true. I should not care much what Harriet Henderson said, for I think she is so ill-natured she would say anything—"

"I don't know about Major Kingsford's goodness and truth, I am sure. I only know that every one seems to me to have grown very wicked and very bad, and to wish to injure Cyril."

"No, no, Mrs. Treherne, Philip is not wicked!"

"You believe him, and do not believe in Cyril."

"Oh, don't say that!" and the warm colour rose to the young girl's cheek. "I would

believe him as—as I believe in Heaven! But I want you to tell him that I am going because —I do not wish to be in his way; he will feel glad, perhaps, just at first, to know I am not within reach. You will give him this letter?" and Willie drew her sealed missive out of her pocket. Slowly and reluctantly did she hand over that death-warrant to all her happiness, signed by her own hand, to Mrs. Treherne; then her eyes filled, and tears coursed each other down her cheeks thick and fast; then, covering her face, and unable any longer to control her emotion, she sobbed violently.

It is not easy for a woman to see another weeping and not weep with her. Crying is not quite so catching as laughing, but very nearly so, and Mrs. Treherne joined Willie; she not only felt for the poor child, but for herself as well, for all the dreams she had indulged in about Cyril, his settling down quietly at Treherne after his marriage, the happiness she contemplated in passing the remainder of her life free from anxiety on his account, the quiet and peace and rest, were now all rudely driven away, and she was not a whit better off than she had been that time twelve months ago.

"What made you determine on going

away?" asked Mrs. Treherne, after a while, when they were both a little calmer.

"It was the best, was it not? I could not bear being here and yet not seeing him."

"But you could have seen him, and perhaps have made it all right. It is not fair by him."

"Nothing can make it right, because"—and Willie spoke very firmly, though with her tear-stained face it seemed more feeling than reason at work within her—"I would not marry him now if he said he wished it: it would only be out of pity to me, and I hate pity from any one; but I should hate it more from him, ten times over, than any one else."

"That man Snape surprises me," said Mrs. Treherne, wiping her eyes in a sort of finishing way, as if to remove all traces of her emotion. "I am sure he knows something about all this, and he either makes it worse or else wants to mix himself up in it, as he does in everything."

A pity Mrs. Henderson could not hear her friend's remark!

"He began it," said Willie. "He began it last August at the school feast at Stanmore; don't you recollect, Mrs. Treherne, our all riding over next day to ask Cyril about him?"

"Yes, perfectly; but I thought it a joke."

"Oh, I wish it had been! I feel as if I should like to die, or lose my senses; oh, I am so miserable!" And the tears fell once more.

What could Mrs. Treherne possibly reply? She remembered her husband's words, "Supposing it to be true!" She could offer her no comfort beyond telling her, as she had already done, that *she* did not believe her son to have been guilty of any wrong. And what mother would believe otherwise? Willie's own sense told her that very distinctly, and so her words did not have much weight; they had no power to relieve her wretchedness.

Jackson knocked at the door presently; he had already been to several without finding his mistress.

"Mr. Thorpe says he hopes Miss Thorpe is ready, madam, as it's time to go," he said, from without.

"Very well; say we are coming directly," replied madam, from within. "Did you take the tea up?"

"Yes, madam, nearly an hour ago."

"Nearly an hour ago! Have we really been up here so long?" said Willie, looking at her watch.

"Indeed we have, my dear."

"I find the time so long and weary at home now," said poor little Willie, "that minutes generally seem hours to me. I suppose it is talking with you has made these go by so fast. You will take care of that letter, won't you, Mrs. Treherne, and—and say all that is kind from me; and—and tell him I shall pray for him, and pray for his happiness," sobbed out the poor child. There was not much of the heroine in her.

Mrs. Treherne ventured on saying that God's will must be done, and that if He willed they were to be parted there was no use in going counter to His almighty power; and, with this doubtful piece of consolation, they returned to the drawing-room.

"A very pleasant time, I hope, you've had upstairs, ladies?" said the admiral, laughing. "Manners go for nothing nowadays, or I should ask what had happened to yours, madam?"

"Don't talk foolish nonsense, my dear," she replied, a little tartly. "Willie and I had a small business matter to transact, and surely there was no harm in my leaving such old friends as Mrs. and Miss Henderson for a few minutes."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Treherne, I should have been pained beyond measure if I thought you treated me with ceremony."

"A few minutes!" cried the admiral. "You don't call sixty a few, do you?"

"Not many, when you are talking on a subject which interests you very much," replied Mrs. Treherne. Then, turning to Willie, she added, "My dear, I am afraid the tea is cold; let me ring for some fresh to be made."

"Not for me, thank you. I could not take any, indeed I could not."

Willie felt, if she attempted to swallow anything, it would choke her. Now her errand was performed she longed to get away; she craved for solitude and the power of enjoying her misery to herself. She was leaving Treherne Court with the tie severed that united her to it in heart and interest, and with nothing to which she could look forward but a dreary future, with a hopeless, aimless life! Now that she had given in her written resignation, that she had relinquished her claim to Cyril's love, and removed all pretensions to becoming his wife, she felt the world a blank, and nothing worth rejoicing for or grieving over. She would rather have courted other sorrows than have steered clear of them; it seemed to her

that if more misery were to befall her this one might seem less overwhelming. A dull, heavy despair seemed to be chilling her heart, and rendering her callous and insensible to the every-day occurrences of life, that, as a rule, give quiet pleasures or are productive of trifling annoyance. But nothing put her out; neither things agreeable nor the reverse had the slightest effect: she took all quietly, uncomplainingly, without the demonstration of approval or disapproval.

This state of things was very trying to her father, who, to do him justice, exerted himself in every possible manner to render her happier. He did all in a man's power to prevent her dwelling on her disappointment, which was the mild term he applied to her sorrow; and to divert her mind into another groove, he talked of their journey, of where they should stop, of what they should see, but all in vain. He expended his powers without meeting with the very smallest return; not even a pretence was made to appear interested in his conversation; so at last he gave it up as hopeless, and trusted that the complete change might bring about what his affection failed to do. As there were now but a very few days before they left, he made up his mind to be resigned, and to let his

child mope and fret till something with greater influence wrought an alteration.

The Delafields called, as they agreed to do, the day after their visit to Treherne, and Willie seemed to brighten up for the time being. Frank Delafield's good-natured conceit amused her, and she knew he liked Cyril, which was alone a claim on her regard.

"We met the Howard girls after leaving Treherne yesterday," said Frank. "Awfully jolly swell that eldest—ain't she?"

"She is going to marry Captain Thurston," said Constance.

"Now, Conny, ca-n't you hold your tongue? What a blab you are! But she is, though, Miss Thorpe; she 's caught him in a tight grip, and he can't get loose again."

"She is very handsome, I think," said Willie.

"Too masculine for me," said the general, who had accompanied his son and daughter. "I don't like ram women."

"The lambs are sometimes quite as difficult to manage," said Mr. Thorpe.

"Well, they look pleasanter and meeker."

"Hang their looks!" cried Frank. "If I am to associate with a devil, let him—her, I mean, be painted black. I hate your gentle, demure

proprieties, who read Scripture to you, and give you a tract for breakfast, a text for luncheon, and a sermon for dinner, and then blackguard you at night."

"And where do you ever find such moral contradictions in petticoats, Master Frank?" asked Mr. Thorpe.

"Law, sir, they abound; only the worst of it is you don't find them out till it's too late. I often tell fellows who are spoony on Conny to take care—that she'd bite at times if she dared; and that she only wants to catch them with her sweet Quakerish simplicity, and then afterwards show the cloven hoof."

"It's all quite true, Frank; only I am surprised you are not ashamed to admit you tease me so shamefully."

"I think I am lucky to be brotherless," said Willie, but at the same time thinking it would be rather pleasant than not, just now in her sorrow, to have a scatter-brain, wild, good-tempered fellow to love her and tease her all in a breath.

"Of course you are, Miss Willie," chimed in the general, "and my friend Thorpe, here, is to be congratulated on not having such a wild, unmanageable boy to pester his life out."

"Now then, guv'nor, hold hard! What

would you say, I should like to know, if I were taken to kingdom come?"

"Hold your tongue, Frank; none of your religious slang, if you please. The boy's spirits carry him away," continued his father, addressing himself in an undertone to William Thorpe.

"I say, Miss Thorpe, did you hear Snakes' 'our beloved in the Lord'"—and Frank's fair, freckled face was drawn down, and his eyes cast up, and his hands palm to palm—"hasn't been seen since the dirty little urchin fetched him from Treherne?"

"Why how did *you* hear any one had come for him?" asked Willie, her poor little face lighting up for a moment in interest.

"How did I hear it? Now what feminine curiosity! You don't clasp your hands and exclaim, 'Oh, what has become of our holy Snakes since yesterday!' but you want to know how I found out he was sent for. I vow I don't think you deserve to hear; now I appeal to you all, does she?"

"How you do tease, Frank! I think had Job come across you his patience would have given way."

"You again, Conny! Will nothing cure you of talking?"

"If you don't tell, I will."

"May you never live to repent of your unsisterly behaviour, Conny! May you never feel the pinch of a tight shoe or a headache from wearing that mass of dead women's hair on the top of it—for you richly deserve such sufferings; however, Miss Thorpe, I'll tell you. I heard it from Charley St. Aubyn, who heard it from Lady St. Aubyn, who heard it from Mrs. Henderson, whom she met driving—the saints know where—yesterday evening. Nobody, you know, but a saint, could possibly be aware of what Mrs. Henderson's mission was."

"Then, who told you Mr. Snape had not appeared since?" asked Willie.

"I can gratify your most ungovernable curiosity on that head also, though I am not really sure that it is wise or right in me to encourage it. However, I will be indulgent this time. Our cook has a first cousin, who has another who resides at a house called 'Laurel Cottage,' and who gains an honest livelihood by letting lodgings; and this cousin's cousin—the one who lets lodgings, you know, not backwards, or that would be our cook—saw old Smith, our coachman, and told him, in rather a dismayed tone, that her 'dear Mr. Snake' had not been

home all night, and that she was all of a heap from nervousness in consequence, as, if anything happened to that holy of holies, most assuredly the devil would get loose amongst us and destroy us to a man. Now, that 's a bad look-out for you ladies!"

"I don't see how it would affect us. If he only took you men out of the way, it would be a great relief."

"Would it, though! You 'd soon find out your mistake. Pray what would you do without us?"

"Do!—do wonderfully well; excessively delightful it would be too. Fancy, no more brothers, and no more teasing!"

"Yes, fancy! It 's all very well for you, Conny; *you* talk so because the men snub you, and think you such a thin, whipping-post sort of girl that if they touched you you 'd snap in two."

"Never mind him, Conny," said Willie; "the truth is, he thinks he may worry you in this way because you are so very much better looking than he is, and so he 's jealous."

"Oh, I like that!"

"I am glad you do," said Constance, quietly. "Willie, will you take me up and show me your owl?"

"Yes, of course I will."

"And leave me to whistle down here, or listen to those two agreeable old gentlemen talking over the Budget. Thank you: let me come too, Miss Thorpe?"

"If you go, I won't," said Conny.

"There's an amiable sister now, isn't she?"

"Come along, Willie; never mind him. I'm always so glad if I get a chance—ever so mean a one, I don't despise it—of paying him off. He really does worry me to death."

The two young girls went off slowly to Willie's glory-hole, Constance stopping on the landing one moment to look down on the fine copy of Raphael's 'Madonna della Seggiola,' which hung on the wall of the principal staircase, in a rich Florentine frame, also copied from the original.

"I always think," she said, "the difference between the ages of the two children insufficiently delineated; the one scarcely seems older than the other, and a few months at that age make so very palpable a difference."

"It is a lovely picture," replied Willie, "but for some reason I never can connect it in any way with our Lord, His mother, and St. John. It is so simple, so homely, so thoroughly like a picture of a young Roman mother, and so com-

pletely wanting in the holy and sacred expression, that I cannot view it as many do. I am not sure, either, that I like the idea of representing our Lord as a helpless infant; it does not seem to me possible that He could ever have been that and God too."

"Ah, I never thought much about it; one looks at those old pictures for the sake of the artist more than the subject; but I am not sure that I do not agree with you. Is that your owl making that most extraordinary noise?"

"Yes; he hears my voice. Poor Snow! poor stupid old dear!" said Willie, going into her room and towards the bird.

After a little petting and talking to it, Constance Delafield, who really had some extra share of curiosity, as her brother was always so rudely telling her, asked Willie to answer the question she had put to her yesterday, with reference to her going abroad.

"Yes, Conny, it is quite true; but please don't ask me more about it, because I can't quite speak about it calmly. It will be all right soon, I dare say."

"Why, what do you mean, Willie? Surely your engagement with Mr. Treherne is not broken off, is it?"

"There never was any engagement, you know. Papa would not allow it; he thought me too young."

"Ah, there's the mistake! But why did you not engage yourself? I should. Not all the papas in the world would have prevented me if I had liked him. How can they judge for us?—they are not inside our hearts! It's all very well to make children obey, but it's nonsense to suppose that when one is grown up one cannot judge and act for oneself."

"You would have done just as I did, Conny, I have no doubt. Papa thought he was right, and—this has come of it."

"It's not about this fisherman's daughter, is it? You don't believe all that story, do you, Willie?"

"I don't know what to believe and what not; and it does not much signify now."

"You're very unhappy, Willie: I see it. You are quite changed. Frank says you look ten years older, and awfully thin. I would not give him up like that without knowing really whether it's all true or not. Frank doesn't believe a word of it."

"At any rate, it is too late now to think of making any change as regards our going away."

"If I see Mr. Treherne I shall tell him, Willie—"

"No, Conny, I beg of you; you must not, indeed you must not. I would not for the world."

"Holloa, girls! I beg your pardon, Miss Thorpe, I forgot Conny was not alone; I meant girl," cried Frank, from the terrace beneath the window of Willie's boudoir, where she and Conny were standing. "What mischief are you brewing up there? Come down, like good creatures; it's awfully slow here with the two old governors. I shall come up to you, I shall, by Jove! if you won't come down. Here, Conny, the governor wants you. He says we must be off," continued Frank, finding his request not even answered. "'They must come now,'" he said, in a lower voice. Then, when that even failed to induce the two girls to go down, he took another tone, and abused his sister; till at last he thought they must have gone out of hearing, as he knew Constance could never listen to all his accusations in silence. So he walked away, and, looking in at the drawing-room as he passed, he saw them both there, quietly talking with Mr. Thorpe and the general. "What an ass I've made of myself!" he exclaimed; "but they shall not know it."

"Now, Conny," said Frank, as they had bid adieu to the Thorpes and were driving home, "tell us all about that poor little thing and her troubles. What's the row about?"

"The row? There isn't any, and I have nothing to tell you; and if I had I wouldn't, so you need not bother me."

"How you two do squabble!" ventured to remark the general.

"Law, sir, it's all Conny! She is the most aggravating monkey you ever met with. Wait, Conny, till you're in love, and won't I make you pay for all your unsisterly treatment of me! You'll see if I don't."

"If ever I am in love—which I never shall be," said Conny—"*you* won't know about it, I can tell you. Why, a cat could not worry a mouse more than you worry me now; so I suppose you would be the death of me then. You know worry *does* kill."

"Then it is a wonder *I* am not dead," sighed the general. "It must have been a miraculous escape."

CHAPTER XIII.

It was Tuesday evening, the day before the one fixed on for the Thorpes' departure; they were to leave on Wednesday morning by the nine o'clock train for London—Willie Thorpe's last evening at home. She was alone in her own room; her father, having had some business to transact at Sedgeport, had ridden over there after an early dinner, and was not expected home till nine or ten o'clock.

She had seen no one and heard nothing more since the Delafields had called. The Hendersons had been, but she had declined seeing them; when their carriage was turning round the sweep that brought it within sight of the house Willie happened to be in one of the front rooms, and she instantly rang the bell and desired the servant to say "Not at home" to the visitors, whoever they were, so the Hendersons

returned to Sandcombe disappointed, being no wiser than when they left it.

Except in sorrow, people, as a rule, are but bad thinkers, they find it too much labour, too much toil, when all around is smiling, but grief forces it on them; they think then, though rarely to much purpose, and brood over their troubles till the brain becomes weary and then perplexed, nothing remains clear or defined, and at last

"Chaos umpire sits,"

till some foreign sound rouses the paralyzed senses into life, and brings back thoughts to the world and things around.

And Willie sat on her low, small, chintz-covered sofa, in one of those dreamy states brought on by a train of thought that had taken her completely out of herself; by little and little she had gone on, one point giving birth to another, till at last the whole was so embroiled in confusion that she was thinking of herself as another, and picturing in the dim mistiness of the future this other self walking in a forest with slow and measured steps dressed in the long, black, gloomy habit of a nun, the dead withered leaves strewing the path she was treading, the leafless trees giving no shelter from the cutting blasts that drove through the

branches: the wood was in north Italy, but where she was going, or whence she had come, she had not time to picture to herself, for suddenly the little table that stood before the window, on which was placed a handsome but heavy china flower-pot with a beautiful geranium in it, was tilted over, it struck the window, and the whole mass fell through, and not through the window only, but also through the thick ground glass which formed the roof of the verandah projecting all along the front of the gallery-windows. The crash was tremendous, and the destruction quick and thorough of glass and china.

Willie started as if she had been struck instead of the window, and in the twilight she was not certain for a moment what had happened; but Dust suddenly leaping into her lap, as if for protection, made her aware that the dog was the origin of the disaster; he had pushed against the table, which, owing to the weight of the flower-pot, was top-heavy, and having done the mischief was alarmed at it.

"Of all base passions fear is most accursed!"

But fortunately for the weaker sex it is not intended they should apply this damning fact to themselves; it is addressed to a man, and

applies only to a man, so Willie had no need to feel any shame at her "linen cheeks" when two or three of the servants rushed out to inquire what had happened.

One at her door and three below all asking the same question, and yet they had the answer before them in the *débris* that strewed the ground and the great gaps in the glass.

"Law, miss, I declare I thought it was you!" exclaimed Willie's own particular maid, a Frenchwoman she had had with her since she was a child.

"Did you, really, Flore? What a horribly noisy person you must have thought me!"

"No, miss, not that," she replied, in a tone that meant to imply she felt hurt. "I thought—well, really, I hardly know what I did think. But it 's a bad omen," she muttered to herself.

So the pieces were swept up, Dust was told he was intensely awkward, the window had a piece of paper pasted over it till the morning, and all things were as if the accident had not happened, except that Willie was herself again, though the process of bringing her back had been somewhat rude.

Willie now set about putting away her little valuables, such things as she had left out till the last moment, and that she allowed no

other hand but her own to touch. One of these was her mother's portrait, a miniature mounted in an ormolu frame, that stood on her table; another a delicately carved tortoisshell box that Philip Kingsford had given her when a child for bonbons, but that now served for holding monograms, which of course she was collecting, but did nothing with, the cutting them out being too fidgety for her. Then there was a very beautiful plate of Dresden china, with her name written in entwined gilt letters on the border. Besides putting these things away, there were papers to destroy and others to lock up. It was a depressing kind of employment, even had there been no heart-ache in the question.

How like, and yet how unlike, was poor Cherry Mason's last night at home! She, too, had her household treasures to store away, but never to see more; and all she took with her might have been placed in the palm of her hand. After all, life is pretty much the same with us all.

"The world 's an inn, and death the journey's end,"

the only difference being that some have good rooms at the inn, with first-rate dinners and drinkable wines, whilst others have carpetless

garrets, with straw to lie on, bread and cheese to eat, and bad beer—or perhaps none—to drink.

It is a gulf of troubled waters at best; the spirit a poor little bark that is tossed to and fro, over which we have no control; we can neither steer it into a peaceful harbour nor under the shelter of a friendly coast; the tide rolls on, and we are borne with it whither it listeth, into smooth waters or to be lashed by the foam of the angry waves; they may dash us into a thousand pieces, and sweep us into the grave—that dread thing the very name of which appals the weakest and the strongest alike; and yet it is very doubtful whether it is not the best gift Nature has in her abundant lap,—it is one she is very prodigal of, because in giving it to us she claims us again, and we return to her bosom to be planted, watered, and cared for, simply to replenish that life without which death would cease. Does not the seed perish before the flower is produced, and then the flower die before the seed ripens? so when life dies, death lives: the only difference is that in the grave all evil is absorbed, never more to propagate or increase; only the good in man after death brings forth fruit. Yet, for all that, it is a

hard thing to have our spirit hurled into what appears to us here, at all events,—blank oblivion.

But we must return to life. We have not just yet to do with death, though it will come upon us presently in all its hideous reality.

Willie looked round her little room, and thought she had completed all the work she wished to do. She had no gift of Cyril's to treasure; no love-token to press to her lips, and recall the moment he gave it. It was, perhaps, best so; it saved her from that questionable pleasure of dwelling on happy moments which gives more often pain — sweet pain, perhaps—than aught else. She had but a photograph—one such as all his acquaintances had among their collections, She had had it when he was little more to her than Jack Mayne or Charley St. Aubyn; but, for all that, she had not allowed it to remain with others when once she had learnt to fathom the mysteries of the heart and to know that Cyril Treherne had penetrated far down, to the very depths, and then taken possession of the whole.

She had cut out the head and placed it in a locket, which she wore round her neck. She had longed to ask him for a curl of his fair

hair, but she had failed in courage, and so she had nothing but this printed reflection on a piece of cardboard to feast her eyes on and dream over. If it be an object to forget a person, a portrait is a great mistake; for every time we look at it—and one is apt to do so often, if not indifferent to the original—the face not only recalls him to our minds, but their best actions and most pleasing moments, as ten to one the picture was taken in a happy hour, the sitter doing his best to look pleasant and agreeable.

And Willie was gazing at Cyril's face, standing by the broken window in order to get all the light she could thrown on it; gazing at it till it faded into a mere patch through the gathering tears. It was a bright face, a handsome, manly face, and his curly hair, well pushed back, showed a broad forehead; there was no meanness in his countenance, no lurking deceit in the expression; a little firmly set was the mouth, as if he liked his own way and stuck to an opinion if once adopted; but the eyes looked boldly out, straightforward and truthful, surely, or no eyes ever lied more. And yet—and yet!

Well, it is hard to judge another's actions till we know what prompted them. Have we

not, every one of us, been guilty at one time or another in our lives of deeds that would scarcely bear the light of day?—that we should hide our heads, bury them out of sight and hearing, if we thought they were to be brought face to face with us, the world looking on? Still there might have been no great evil in them; perhaps, even, we did them hoping good to follow, regardless of the gospel command not to do evil that good may come of it. Men have many temptations that women never heard of, and could not understand if they did: had not Cyril Treherne himself told Willie that if he were to tell her everything it might give her useless pain? Still there is a limit to all things, a limit none should pass, be the inducement what it may, though we allow, from necessity, the fact that—

> "The veriest hermit in the nation
> May yield, God knows, to strong temptation!"

Dust was shaking his mistress's dress. Dust wished to go out: he had caught hearing of a cat in the distance, and Dust hated a cat more than anything else—Snow excepted—in life, and longed therefore to annihilate it or have his own coat torn off his back by her claws; he always bore his wounds bravely, as became a dog. So Willie told him to be still, and she

would take him out. She was herself not sorry for an excuse to wander about her home, and take leave of her favourite spots. And it was a lovely evening; the young crescent moon rising slowly and tipping the tops of the trees with a silver light, and flecking the green lawn with dark patches; the stars coming out one by one, till, countless, they bespangled the boundless sky with their pure radiance.

This is the hour, when silence has set her finger on creation, to steal from the turmoil of life and commune with self; this is the hour when throbbing passions may be soothed into peace, when evil thoughts may be crushed, and when the cares that have weighed us down during the day may be lost in temporary but sweet forgetfulness.

There was not a leaf stirring, even the birds had gone to roost, except the nightingale and bat, and the one sang out its glorious hymn, whilst the other flitted past in the still air, darting across the rapid stream, skimming the waters in search of food, as Willie went out to take a last stroll amongst her favourite haunts.

> "It was an evening bright and still
> As ever blush'd on wave or bower,
> Smiling from heaven, as if nought ill
> Could happen in so sweet an hour."

And yet it is often when nature seems most in harmony that discord reigns in our souls. When the sky is clearest our hopes are clouded; when the stars are brilliant, and the moon is shedding her soft pale light, our eyes are dimmed with the hot tears that the very tranquillity and peace around us have caused to flow.

"If this were but to-morrow night!" sighed Willie, as she reached the hollow, and sat down on the old clump, her favourite seat. "I dread to-morrow morning, our leaving, our saying 'Good-bye' to the servants, the horses, the house—all, even the very trees and flowers. I am glad Philip is not going with us. I am glad I can sit still and not have to talk during the long journey to London. He is so kind, so attentive, that I should fear to pain if I were silent. But I cannot bear talking now, and nothing any one says interests me. I wonder how long this dreadful feeling will last. There is nothing now could make me rejoice, nothing that could bring me comfort, and nothing I verily believe that could make my heart feel heavier. Nothing can darken or brighten my future. I would it were a blank; that forgetfulness would wipe away every memory, every thought; that I might live on

as long as life is left, as do these trees that are soulless, or that river which leaps on through forests and meadows, skirting mossy banks and stony heights, in sunshine and storm, tumbling over a rock here, a branch there, till it flows at last calmly and peacefully into the never-slumbering dark-blue sea, engulfed and forgotten in the mighty ocean!"

Thoughts will unconsciously overflow in foolish words when the heart is suffering; so poor little Willie became half poetic in her moonlight meditations. Her little dog seemed more quiet than usual; but then he was not accustomed to such eccentricities on his mistress's part as sitting in the hollow at that hour, and he had been in hot chase after a river rat that had had the imprudence to risk his presence on the lawn—a liberty he paid dearly for, as he now lay dead. Dust's teeth had met through him, and Dust now sat panting, but still, at Willie's feet.

Suddenly a star shot across the sky like a diamond spark, and for a moment left a luminous track in its rear. Then all was as if it had not been, like many lives, not even leaving a dark spot to show where it once was. Who could take account of the myriads of souls that thus pass away, like a shooting-star,

into space, but the one great almighty, overruling Power? And is each spirit that thus leaves us reckoned as a thing that is eternal; or after this is it all oblivion?

Presently the sound of the lodge bell roused Willie from her reverie.

"That is papa come home. Let us go in, Dust; and good-bye, sweet spot!" and she stooped and, like a foolish child, kissed the old tree clump. "I wonder if I shall ever see you again, ever sit here and dream away a less miserable, less hopeless hour. If it were all false, as Lady St. Aubyn and Constance Delafield say, if—God, how I wish I could make a promise, a bargain with Thee!—to grant me his love again, and I to give Thee—what, ah, what have I to give that would be an equivalent to so precious a gift!"

Slowly and sadly did she walk up towards the house, yet in the midst of all her misery being very careful where she trod; for if there was anything she had a greater horror of than another it was a frog, and to have trodden on one would have driven her half crazy, so that her attention was drawn very much to the ground. She did not, therefore, see a light flit across her boudoir; had she done so, she would have known she was being

sought. However, as she reached the terrace she saw a servant looking about, and as soon as he saw Willie approaching he went towards her.

"Is papa come home?" she asked, with a sort of feeling that it was not on her father's account he was seeking her.

"No, miss, Mr. Thorpe has not yet returned; but there is a person who is asking to speak to you. I said I thought you were engaged, miss, for she seems a common like sort of person; but she said I must go and see, and if you were she should wait till you were not engaged."

"Don't you know who it is?" asked Willie.

"No, miss; I never saw her before. She 's a very big, fat woman."

"And did she not say what she wanted?"

"She seemed angry like, miss, when I asked her what her business was, and said it was you, and you only, she would tell it to."

"Very well; where is she?" said Willie, supposing it to be some one who came to beg, and thinking she would not refuse any petition on this her last night. They would not have the chance of any assistance from her after this.

"She 's in the servants' hall, miss."

"Send her up here," said Miss Thorpe.

"Into the gallery, miss?"

"Yes."

Sitting on one of the low spring ottomans, and leaning her head against the soft silk that covered them, Willie awaited her importunate visitor. She was not kept long. She heard the door close at the head of the kitchen stairs, and the one that led into the hall opened, and then there stood at the entrance of the gallery a very large, stout woman, looking the same breadth from head to foot, dressed in a lilac cotton, a black shawl, patched about with yellow, green, and red, and a large straw poke bonnet. She dropped a curtsey, but did not open her lips.

"You wished to see me, my good woman?" said Willie.

But there was no answer till the door behind her had been shut by the servaut who brought her upstairs. Then, turning her head round quickly from right to left, and left to right, she looked at the young girl before her, whose face was very distinct, for the lamp that stood on a side table threw its full light on it.

"Yes, miss. To see you *quite* alone, if you plea-se."

"Well, we are alone. You can say what

you wish without any fear of being overheard."

"I am Mrs. Cheadle, miss."

"Are you?" said Willie, the name not striking her as at all familiar, and not much caring who she was.

"Yes, miss, Mrs. Cheadle, of the Rising Sun."

"The Rising Sun! Oh, yes, I think I recollect. No, no, I make a mistake; I was forgetting. I fancied I knew you, but I remember now it was only a boy I heard speak about the Rising Sun. Go on, Mrs. Cheadle—I think you said Cheadle?"

"Yes, miss—Cheadle. Well, miss, I've come all this way on my blessed legs to beg you to go back with me to the Rising Sun."

"I! What for?" exclaimed Willie, amazed, and beginning to think the woman demented.

"Well, ma'am—miss, I begs your humble pardon—there's one a-lying at the Rising Sun that'll ne'er see another sunrise, it's my firm belief; and it's her request, her dying prayer, you'll go and see her."

"But who is it? I don't understand you," said Willie, almost frightened by the woman's strange manner and stranger way of talking.

"It's the poor lass that left her father's

home—the coastguardsman's daughter; and she's been a-taking of refuge with me little better than three weeks, and I promised her, I did, never to let mortal being know where she was, she was so awful afeared her father would find her out, and perhaps kill her with his anger, till she took so ill I didn't dare to keep the secret any longer; so I sent first of all to the Reverend Samu-el Snape, and then he comed over and seed her, and then a doctor came and said she must die. So then, when she knowed that, she prayed so hard, and did cry so bitterly, to get me to come and ask you to go over and see her. She says she has something to tell you, and she won't tell nobody else; and she can't die quiet, poor soul, unless she do see you."

A rush of conflicting thoughts crossed poor Willie. Amazement, after a while, gave way to curiosity, and curiosity to anxiety and perplexity.

"But where is your house?" she asked, at last.

"A little better than four mile from this," said the stout landlady, with complacency, as if four miles were four steps.

"But how am I to get there? and at this hour, too!"

She did not address herself to Mrs. Cheadle,

though that worthy lady took upon herself to answer,—

"Drive, sure, miss."

"But it must be past nine o'clock!"

"And maybe it is—you're safe! Bless you, miss, you'd be as safe at the Rising Sun as in your own bed!"

"But it's almost impossible: my father is out, and—"

"Well, miss, life won't last for no father; and if she die and you don't see her it may be worser for you than for she!"

An intense desire to go, and yet a fear to do so, struggled together, till Willie hardly knew what the contest would lead her into doing. This girl, the "person" that had been nameless to her—this being who had been the cause of destroying her whole life's happiness—was dying; dying, and would be removed out of Cyril's path; dying, and sent to *her* to speak to her: she had something to tell her—perhaps to leave some message for Cyril; yet hardly to her would she entrust it, it would not be to her she would send for that purpose! And then, had she not been with Cyril? and yet if she had been in this woman's house three weeks she could not have been with Cyril.

"If you please, miss, to make up your

mind," said Mrs. Cheadle, whose good manners had induced her to remain silent as long as possible; but seeing minutes were passing, and Willie sitting with her head resting on her hand, and making no sign of moving, she could bear it no longer, and spoke at last. "I must be going; she's next door to being alone, for a man don't count for much in a sick-room, nor out of it, neither, in my opinion; they're a bad lot, take them as a lot!"

"A man, did you say? Who?" asked Miss Thorpe, rising up suddenly.

"Oh, well, he's as good as another, and may be a bit better in the ghostly line; it's the Reverend Samu-el I left with her."

"Oh!" and Willie once more relapsed into silence.

"Well, miss?" said Mrs. Cheadle, again breaking the silence.

"I will go, Mrs. Cheadle," she said, speaking firmly and rising. "Take a chair there for a few minutes"; then she rang the bell. "How did you come over? Oh, I recollect; you walked. Would you not like some refreshment?"

"There's no time to be lost, miss."

"No; but whilst I am getting ready"; then to the servant who answered her summons she

said, "Tell Mansell I want the pony-carriage brought round directly, and I shall want him to go with it. And please ask Mrs. Storks to give this person something to eat. Go down, Mrs. Cheadle, and I will send for you as soon as the carriage is at the door."

"Well, if we drives, we 'll do it quicker, so I suppose I may eat a mouthful. Thankee, miss; you 'll not be longer than you can help?"

"No, no, I shall not be long."

If the man—Thomas by name—had dared, he would most certainly have asked his young mistress what in the world could take her out in the pony-carriage at that hour, when most decent folks were thinking of going to bed; but he consoled himself with the thought that Mrs. Cheadle might be more communicative after she had imbibed some of the Yardley Wood home-brewed than she had been immediately after a four miles' walk.

As to Flore, when summoned to give Miss Thorpe out a shawl and her hat, she put it all down to the broken flower-pot—a sure sign of death and destruction; and if her young lady returned alive it would nearly disappoint her, so certain was she that nothing but evil must follow such a catastrophe. She begged to be allowed to go with her mistress.

"You will knock yourself up; you will not be fit to travel to-morrow. Your papa will go crazy when he comes home and finds you're gone off alone with a great fat woman in the pony-carriage."

"I may be home before papa; but, if I am not, be sure and tell him I shall not be long, and that I am only gone to see a poor woman who is dying, and who has sent for me."

"It's all very well," thought Flore, as she watched the slight girlish figure disappear down the long passage, "but it looks uncommonly odd!"

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a lovely night for a drive or any other out-door exercise. The silent air was full of a dewy freshness that seemed to give life to the drowsy earth. The moon, now sending forth her white, silvery light, unshadowed by the twilight which had thrown a veil over its brilliancy, till it died away into the blackness of night, was gliding through the calm and cloudless sky, making the earth beneath gleam with grotesque forms, by the rays that shot through the tree-boughs, whilst the green leaves seemed of a silvery grey. The road that led up to the Rising Sun was a narrow by-lane, that was quite unknown to Willie, with high ground on either side; and they seemed to have been going up hill almost the whole way. At last the summit was reached, and then a glorious panorama was spread before them.

Willie loved scenery and nature more than

all else; she never wearied of it. She could not help exclaiming, with no more sympathizing audience than Mansell and Mrs. Cheadle,—

"Oh, how wonderfully grand!"

That largest of all cemeteries—the boundless sea—lay at their feet; they seemed to be on the edge of a beetling rock; at its foot,

> "The bridegroom sea
> Is toying with the shore, his wedded bride;
> And in the fulness of his married joy
> He decorates her tawny brow with shells,
> Retires a pace to see how fair she looks,
> Then, proud, runs up to kiss her!"

The wild waves are calm, the rippling water is dancing gladly beneath the moonbeams, yet its deep, mellow voice is heard as it rolls softly over the hard smooth sand, leaving it for a moment clad with a frosted silver carpet, which presently melts away.

They kept the high land, following the coast, and seemingly on the very edge of the cliffs. But Mrs. Cheadle's directions to Mansell had seemed very distinct, and Mansell was a steady driver, so Willie thought they would probably keep the right road and not be pitched over the precipice; still she was sufficiently uncomfortable not to be able to dwell undisturbed on her errand. The novelty of the

position, too, seemed to have some share in her disquietude, as also the frequent question that would suggest itself, and to which she could offer no reply, "What would her father think if he reached home before her return?" Well, if he did, she hoped he would not be uneasy; but she could not have acted otherwise than she had done.

"Is it much further?" she asked, as the ponies gave a sudden start, and went on at a pace rather alarming, to say the least of it, considering where they were. It was the dark shadow of a dead tree thrown across the road by the moon's rays, and looking like a colossal man with outstretched arms, till they were near it, and then it looked more frightful still; the ponies would have shied but for the well-applied cut with the whip, which sent them over it with a kind of leap, for to them it seemed an object and not a mere shadow. It was two or three minutes before they recovered themselves.

"No, thank God, my dear!" replied Mrs. Cheadle, fright or the home-brewed making her affectionate. "It 's about as far as Badstow Cliff is from my house—the Rising Sun."

"But, as I don't know where your house is, that does not explain much to me."

"Well, dear, it 's little better than a mile, and I 'll thank the Lord when we reach it! I 'd rather, far away, trust to my own two legs than I would to them four uncertain ones of them beasts. You never feel sure where they may take you to; but you do of your own. I wonder how that poor thing is getting on? I do hope the minister won't give her an over-dose of the devil; it 'll kill her off outright if he do. Bless me! how that ere devil do trouble us all at the last! and why he won't leave us alone?—we never wants him, I 'm sure!"

"An over-dose of what, Mrs. Cheadle?" asked Miss Thorpe, thinking she had misunderstood the woman.

"The devil, dearie!"

"Oh!" said Willie, a moment afterwards; not being able to make out what was meant, and thinking it best not to ask.

"You know Mr. Snape, of course?"

"I have heard of him."

"Well, you know, miss, them great clergymen, who understand the Bible, which is the difficultest book of all to understand, say that the poor are more wickeder inclined than the rich, and that the devil gets the most on 'em. It may be, but the Lord 's merciful; any way, it 's harder for the poor to keep straight, they

get soonest tempted; and then you see, as the scum comes topmost on jam when you put it on the fire, so temptation like the fire brings all the bad to the top of our natures. I'd like to know if Mr. Snape, or Mr. Byron or Mr. Shakspeare, or any other big man—them two were big men, weren't they, miss?—were to be tempted like that poor girl up yonder, whether they'd not 'ave given way to their feelings! They wouldn't resist a hot rumpsteak if their stomachs were empty, a bit more than she'd refuse a pretty gown if she'd got the offer of it. Them parsons don't understand the female weaknesses—it don't come home to them, you see; so they're hard upon us, and tell us we shall burn in the next world if we don't keep a sharp look out in this 'gainst the pomps and vanities and moralities. But morals, my dear, differ according to the sex; what's moral for a man ain't moral for a woman. Now I don't dare say so, but God Almighty don't make laws for men and another set for women; and, betwixt ourselves, I believe if one goes to hell for doing what she oughtn't, so will t'other. Law bless my soul, it's not likely there would be time at the last day to inquire into the sex of the party! No, I wager a pot of my XXX ale that there ben't no question on that head.

Lord have mercy upon us! for the parsons won't. Amen."

And Mrs. Cheadle relapsed into silence, simply because she could not find any more words to utter. Had Willie encouraged her the least by a remark of the most simple kind, it would have stimulated her sufficiently to exercise her brain till she found something more to say; for if Mrs. Cheadle loved one thing more than another it was to hear her own voice. So they drove on in silence till Mansell turned round, and, pointing with his whip to a little house, where a light shone in a top window, he asked if that were not the Rising Sun. Mrs. Cheadle was half dozing, but she roused up and answered,—

"Right, sir; that's it!" Then, turning to Willie, "You see, miss, it's not so very far, and it's a nice place when you get to it."

"Yes, I have no doubt," she replied, fearing she might hurt her companion's feelings if she let the remark go by unnoticed.

In a minute or two they pulled up at the entrance of the Rising Sun. The signboard hung perfectly still, the great yellow face looking pale by the light of the moon. Mrs. Cheadle looked put out, because the man of all

work—the Boots—was not standing at the door ready to receive her; or perhaps she was annoyed that the first and last chance of her drudge seeing her in a carriage, and sitting side by side with a lady, was lost. She got out, however, and opened the door and called lustily for Boots, but it was some moments before that individual presented himself. Then, instead of coming quietly and respectfully, he came forward noisily, rattling some pewter pots together, and ready to pitch into his mistress for leaving him all that time to do the whole work of the Rising Sun with his own two arms. The sight of the carriage and the lady, however, calmed his rising anger, and he shuffled back into the parlour, and told the guests there assembled to be quiet, not to roar too much, and he'd bring them the beer directly.

As the door opened and Willie caught sight of some half-dozen evilly disposed looking people—two playing at dominoes at a little dirty table, two more with a pack of cards, that even at that distance looked as if they must be stiff and sticky with dirt, others drinking beer—the whole of them smoking long white clay pipes, her heart sank, and she felt inclined to turn back, jump into the carriage, and tell

Mansell to get home as fast as the ponies could take them.

"Drat that Boots!" muttered the landlady, as the awkward fellow permitted the interior of the parlour to be visible. "Shut that door, and bring a light here."

"I 'm a-coming," he answered, in a surly tone, bringing a tallow candle in a brass candlestick in his hand.

"This way, if you please, miss—follow me. There 's a step first—there. Light the lady, Boots. There, shut the door," continued Mrs. Cheadle, as they reached her private room; "and draw the curtain over against that door, and then we shan't hear them men a-talking. Is Mr. Snape still here?"

"No, missus; he left nigh upon an hour ago. He said you had promised him some supper; and I told him you 'd left none out, so he took up his hat and went off."

"That man 's always for eating! It 's my belief he gets ne'er a bit but what he eats out of other people's pockets. And did he leave no message?"

"He said he 'd call to-morrow, but it wouldn't be early, because he had to go somewhere first. There, missus, I must go; them 's a-calling for their beer, and—"

"Well, and about the girl?"

"I knows nothing about she; how should I?"

"Be off, then! Now, miss, would you wait here a little moment whilst I go up and tell her you 're here?"

"Can't I go with you?" asked Willie, timidly, feeling as if she were in an ogre's den, and fearing every moment something dreadful would happen to her.

"It would be a'most better to tell her first. You see she 's terrible bad, or I shouldn't have come to you; and it might startle her quite out if I didn't see her first."

"Then you won't be long. I don't like stopping here alone."

"I won't be a minute; but you 're as safe here as in a church."

"Those people in there," said Willie, stopping Mrs. Cheadle just as she was disappearing; "they won't—they can't come in here?"

"Law, bless you, no! I should like to see them! They 'd never put their foot inside the Rising Sun if they dared to show any of their ugly mugs here! No, no, you stay quiet; not a mouse even will disturb you, for we keep a cat."

This was said in a reassuring, cheerful sort

of tone, and then she vanished up the narrow ladder-stairs that led to the only room she had available for travellers.

It had now but a sorry occupant; and it would appear anything but a lucrative one that now was in possession of it. Lying on the same bed where she once lay before was Cherry Mason, or all that remained of the once bright, beautiful daughter of the coast-guardsman.

She was on her side, her face turned to the door; her large, wondering eyes—more startled-looking than ever, yet strangely beautiful still—were fixed on it; but every other minute she closed them, as if the mere exertion of keeping them open fatigued her. Her arms and neck were bare, the night-dress was open, and you saw in the miserable light cast by the one candle that stood on the drawers a something shining which her poor, thin hand clutched incessantly with a nervous, jealous grasp, and then her eyes would give a glance round, as if in that miserable chamber some one might be watching her, and looking for a chance of robbing her of this, her sole treasure.

She was suffering intensely from heat, and the labour with which she breathed exhausted her so greatly that the perspiration stood out

in drops on her forehead. She held a handkerchief, which every now and then she endeavoured to pass over her face. She wore the ashy paleness of death. Her white lips were parted, and showed her small, even teeth. She could not have breathed at all, had her mouth been closed. She turned her head slowly round, every now and then, so that her ear might catch the sound of any one approaching. Her long black hair, the only thing that seemed unchanged in her, was hanging all about her, adding to her discomfort, and increasing the heat, which was great, independently of that which her state of debility produced, for the room was small and close.

The moment she heard the carriage stop in front of the house-door she endeavoured to raise herself up; but though she succeeded she was unable to maintain her position. The arm that a few months ago was round and firm, disease had reduced to the very bone, the skin alone covering it; and it hurt her to rest on the elbow, besides her not having the strength to support herself on it. She fell back, and a fit of coughing came on, which left her so exhausted that she was incapable of stretching out her hand to reach the medicine standing on a chair beside her, and which she knew would

lend her the temporary strength she required. So she lay panting and struggling for breath, even the power of listening being denied her. At last, when life in its struggle with death—as it frequently does when near the end—gained a temporary ascendency, she heard Mrs. Cheadle speaking in the parlour, though she could hear no one answering. She knew the mistress of the Rising Sun had rather a loud voice, and perhaps that accounted for it. She knew that, whether alone or not, now she had returned she would soon come upstairs, for in this last visit of poor Cherry's she had acted the true woman's part by the poor outcast; and though her ways were not of the softest, or her nursing of the gentlest, still the dying girl was grateful from the very bottom of her heart, for where would she have been now but for her?

Patiently and less restlessly since her fit of coughing did Cherry Mason await her benefactor's visit, though the seconds were as minutes to her till she heard the heavy clumping steps of Mrs. Cheadle ascending. Her eyes did not close now; they opened wide, and with a strained expression were fixed on the door. It was soon opened, and the good body's fat, hot, shining face and portly figure appeared.

"Well, my dear, I 'm back, you see. I've been a long time, haven't I? But you see a long distance takes a long time to go."

"Yes," said Cherry, faintly, and longing to know what success had attended her journey.

She did not know it, but Mrs. Cheadle was doing the poor girl more harm by not telling her at once than she could possibly have done by blurting it straight out.

"And how are you feeling, my dear?"

"Pain here," replied the poor girl, putting her hand on her chest. "Pain to breathe—the other—pain—is gone now," she gasped out. Then she made a sign for her medicine. "Please give it me," she said, trying to raise herself up so as to take it.

"Here, my dear, let me help you a bit. Lord, what a bag of bones it is! Poor lamb! Poor dear!"

It was not gently done, but the words were gently spoken; and then, after knocking the bottle against the glass—a stemless wine-glass—she handed her the cordial, which the dying girl drank greedily. Then she lay back again for a moment, closing her eyes. In a few minutes she was better; she felt revived, and the breathing became less hard and gasping.

"I'm better now," she said presently. Then she asked at once,—"Is she come?"

Her heart beat loudly at the inward doubt her own question had raised.

Mrs. Cheadle nodded her big head in the affirmative.

"In course she is, my dear! She's not one of them fine sort of ladies that would let a poor woman tramp four blessed miles for nothin'. But," she added, after a pause, "she was a bit afeared at first; and I'm not a-going to say she was to blame, for, you see, she knowed nothin' of me and nothin' of you, though I suspect she guesses summut."

"Will she come up?" asked Cherry, who, whilst Mrs. Cheadle had been talking, had offered up a silent prayer to God for having granted her this request.

"To be sure, when you're ready. I thought I'd best put you a bit tidy first. All them great ropes of hair,—let me roll 'em up out of the way. They must make you very hot, my dear?"

"Yes," said Cherry. "Please, gently," she continued, as Mrs. Cheadle was handling rather roughly the mass of thick hair that was hanging in all directions about her.

"It's so entangled, my dear. Shall I brush it a bit?"

"No, no, thank you. It won't matter," she added; "it will do as it is till I'm gone. It won't be long, will it?"

And she looked up quickly, to see if the woman who had been so good to her could give her any hope.

"Don't talk on like that, dearie. When it's God's will you know we must go. But He's very good, and never lets us know the exact time, so we can always hope."

"There's no hope for me!"

"Well, dear, you'll go from sorrow and suffering, you know."

"That's true! But, oh, that I might have seen *him* once more! Well, it is something I am to see *her*. Will you send her up now?"

"Yes, dear."

Mrs. Cheadle was just leaving the room when Cherry recalled her.

"Is she pretty?" she asked.

"Yes, dearie, that she is. It's a sweet lovable face; but it looks sad, too; and she's pretty blue eyes."

"Is she very tall—proud looking?"

"Bless me, no! She's a little thing,—not much bigger than you are."

"I 'm glad of that! She won't frighten me then?"

"Not she! You're much more likely to frighten her," muttered Mrs. Cheadle, as she went downstairs to fetch Miss Thorpe.

Willie's patience was exhausted; she had sat there for the half-hour Mrs. Cheadle had been absent, working herself up into such a state of nervousness that she certainly would have run away out of the house, but that she was afraid of moving for fear of coming across some of those rough-looking men she had caught sight of on entering.

"How very long you have been!" she said, as soon as Mrs. Cheadle's broad person filled up the doorway. "I ought to be on my way home by this; my father will be so anxious, especially not knowing where I am."

"I couldn't help it, my—miss. That poor thing upstairs wanted some medicine, and was so beat, when I first went up, I thought she wouldn't have lived to see you at all. You've not been troubled by any one, I hope,—nobody's been in here?"

"No, no one has been near me. But those people have been making a horrid noise."

"Well, miss, it's impossible to shut their mouths; men will talk, and so will women;

we must put up with them. Now, will you come up? She's waiting for you."

"Yes, I am ready. But will you just tell me something first? How long have you known this poor girl?"

"Let me see; it was last August, I think; yes, or very nigh it. That makes one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight months, don't it?" Mrs. Cheadle spoke very slowly, and as if it was not easy to recollect at so great a distance an exact date. She counted the months on her fingers by striking her cheek with each finger as she named them.

"But this is April, and the end of it."

"Yes; but I was a-thinking, it won't do to count August, for I'm not quite certain that it was August, and if it was, then it was right the end of it."

"And how did she first come here?"

"How? Well, I was a-going to say on her legs; but that wouldn't be true, for she was carried here."

"Carried? Was she ill?"

"Not ill like now; but ill, for all that—very ill."

Willie was getting bewildered. She thought she would unravel the mystery about this poor hapless "person" before coming face to face

with her, but every step she took seemed to render it more incomprehensible.

"And did she stay long with you?"

"No, she didn't. And that's where I felt myself injured. She was took away the very next day."

Mrs. Cheadle's eyes shot out angry glances, and her cheeks grew red at the mere recollection of how she had been, what she considered, done.

"And who took her away?"

"Why, who but her own father, in course!"

"But—but her father didn't bring her—didn't carry her here?"

"Well, no; he didn't."

But Mrs. Cheadle recollected her promise never to open her lips on that part of the business, and remembered also how liberally she had been paid for that one night's lodging, with the promise of more favours to come if she kept her own counsel. And having done so up to this point, she was not going to risk the chance of future reward by letting out her secret at the very end of the chapter.

"Then who did?"

Now Mrs. Cheadle had a horror of a lie, and yet she was so placed that she didn't see her escape from the net that was being put round

her if she did not utter one. A woman who hesitates is said to be lost. Be that as it may, Mrs. Cheadle hesitated, but she would have resented the statement that she was in consequence done for. However, she thought, during the pause that followed the question, there could be no harm in evasion. So she gave a sudden start, and turned sharply towards the door, and pretended to listen anxiously.

"Didn't you hear a moan?" she asked, trying to look frightened.

"No," said Willie, who, in the misery and suspense of the moment, would not have cared much if she had. She felt as if there was a cleft in the dark lowering sky that overhung her, and that the answer to that one little question would either open it widely and let in the bright sunshine once more, clearing with its grand light and warmth all the clouds away, or close them up, and let them gather with greater darkness, till the storm burst and destroyed her.

"That 's no go!" muttered Mrs. Cheadle to herself. Then she said aloud, "I do think, miss, you 'd best go up. You see, every minute you delay makes your getting home the later."

This was true, and Willie felt the force of it; so she said, "I will go instantly; but *do*

answer me that one question. I won't ask you another—I won't, indeed."

"But, my dear—miss, I beg your pardon, how can a poor woman like me undertake to say who everybody is? I didn't see who brought her in. I know there were one or two, but, law! it 's nigh impossible to say who they was."

"But did none of those who brought her in stay with her?"

"Now didn't you promise not to ask another question?"

"Yes; but that was if you answered me the other."

"But there 's no satisfying you."

"Yes, there is!" Willie began to feel angry and provoked: knowing full well she was actually within a thin covering of the kernel in the nut she had so long wished to break, it made it doubly tantalizing. In her eagerness she went up to Mrs. Cheadle, and laid her small white hand on the woman's great fat arm, and looked up pleadingly into her honest coarse face, and said, "You do not know how much depends on your telling me—my whole future happiness, perhaps."

"Why, my dear, who do you imagine it to have been?"

"If I tell you, will you then answer me simply 'Yes' or 'No'?" Willie's face was pale with the anxiousness of her uncertainty; her eyes seemed as if they would pierce through, if they could, the massive body of Mrs. Cheadle, and read there all she knew of this terrible business. "Will you?" said Willie, earnestly, as Mrs. Cheadle remained silent.

"Well, we'll see. Who do you think it could have been?"

"Mr. Treherne." Willie spoke in a slow, hollow voice, and, when she had uttered his name, she shrank back, as if afraid of the answer that might be given.

"You're right," said Mrs. Cheadle, slowly, and almost in a whisper.

"Oh, God! then it is all true—all true!" And Willie clasped her head in her hands, as if to keep her senses from running away and leaving her distracted. After a moment she looked up and said, "I am ready to go upstairs now." Her face was nearly as white as the poor dying girl's she was going to see.

CHAPTER XV.

There is something very awful in going into the presence of one whom you know to be on the brink of the grave; in thinking that the body you see lying there before you, breathing, moving, speaking, will in a few short hours be parted from the soul that gives animation, and be a mere lifeless mass, unconscious, without feeling, and no more—though yet bearing the features and form of man—than the dust that lines the path we walk on.

Willie Thorpe had never seen any one dead, or even dying; yet she went up those narrow steep stairs that were to bring her face to face with one whose life might now be counted by minutes with an unfaltering step and a steady heart. Her mind was so occupied with the death-blow that moment dealt to all her hopes, that she did not consider where she was going, or give a thought as to why she was asked to go.

She had not realized, till Mrs. Cheadle uttered those fatal words—"You 're right!"—how deeply she had permitted Lady St. Aubyn's and Constance Delafield's words to take root in her breast, and how quickly that rapid-growing plant, Hope, had resuscitated and revived under their comforting assurances.

It was worse, a thousand times over, than if she had been left down at the bottom of the gulf of despair; but to be lifted partially out of it, to be allowed to see the reflection of the light of heaven above, and then to fall back again, was very terrible.

Mrs. Cheadle stood with the door open, but as far back as possible, so as to allow Miss Thorpe to pass, for there was not much room—the door opened against one side of the room, and on the other stood the bed with the poor dying girl on it. Willie started when her eyes fell on the strangely beautiful face, and those large lustrous eyes, that were gazing at her with an expression that to the last hour of her own life she never forgot. There was a wistful eager look, as if she were not sure whether she were a reality or a vision: then she stretched out her poor emaciated arm, and said, in a husky, thick voice,—

"Come here—near to me."

For a moment fear took possession of Willie, and she drew back. Cherry noticed the movement, but mistook the cause which gave rise to it, and the poor thing let her head fall and murmured,—

"Oh, I am not so bad—not so bad!"

And then the hot scalding tears trickled slowly down her wan cheek—tears that welled up from the living soul that was doomed to part from its earthly tabernacle, the soul that may be yet weeping over the faults committed when the spirit was too weak to wrestle against the flesh, but that could not have erred very deeply, for its tenure of life had been but short; and the young have that comfort in meeting death, that their burden of sin is not very heavy.

Reproach and remorse instantly brought Willie to the girl's bed-side, and, kneeling down by her, she took her thin transparent hand in hers, and said, in a soft, soothing voice,—

"I have come to see you. I wish I could do you any good. Is there anything I can do for you?" And her own eyes filled with tears as she saw the sudden change from misery and disappointment to calmness and tranquillity her words had created.

"I want to speak to you—alone. You do

not mind, do you?" she asked, as, with keen eyes, she fancied she saw Willie hesitate.

"No, indeed I do not!" Then, turning to Mrs. Cheadle, who was bustling about the room and making believe she was very busy, whereas its very bareness rendered that impossible,—"Will you leave us a little, if you please? This—she—she wishes to speak to me alone."

"To be sure—to be sure, miss," replied the landlady, at the same time showing evidence of displeasure that there could possibly be anything to say that she might not hear. However, she went; but it was not till her last heavy footstep was heard that silence was broken. Then Willie spoke, for Cherry seemed exhausted for the moment.

"You sent to see me. I have come a long way; but I do not know why you wished to see me."

"Don't you?" said Cherry, coughing, but trying to exert herself and speak distinctly. "You know who I am."

"Partly. I know who your father is, and—"

"Go on, please. I will tell you all you don't know; but it will save my breath if you let me know all you do—and I have much, I know, to tell you—and I want to be able to do

it before I die—and I am dying!" she gasped out, her cough interrupting her at every third or fourth word.

"I know!" continued Willie, forcing herself to speak, and knowing now she was speaking to one who would never repeat her words, "I know it was you nursed and attended to—"

"Mr. Treherne. Yes; *I* can speak his name now!"

"And that he used to go and see you, and—and he induced you to leave your home—"

"It's a lie!" cried out the poor girl, with sudden energy, interrupting Willie, whose own breath seemed to come short and quick. It was a hard task she had before her, but, having begun, she determined to go through, and at every stage it became easier and lighter. "But go on—tell me all they said. Oh, that they had only told the falsehoods of me!"

"That he brought you to an inn and deserted you,"—a strange smile passed over Cherry's face—"but that afterwards he was sorry; and after your father had taken you back again, he sent for you and you joined him in his yacht."

Willie ceased, but the terrible, wearing, killing cough prevented poor Cherry speaking for several minutes. Willie got her some of

the medicine, at a sign from her, and gave it her. After a little it produced its effect, and she was eased. Then, with the one hand laid on Willie's arm and the other clasping her locket, she said,—

"I have never seen Mr. Treherne since he left England. It is true he brought me here, but it was because he found me by chance, almost insensible, on the hills not far from his home, and he didn't know what to do with me. And then I prayed him—aye, I implored him—to take me away with him—and he told me—of his love for you—and that he could not. And he came the next day, not on his own account, but my father's, to beg me to return home; and I again prayed, with all the power in me, that he would take me—but he was too honourable, too good and great, to be led astray by such a miserable wretch. My God! how I loved him!"

And the dying girl clasped her thin hands together, and looked up with those large, beautiful eyes, which for a moment were lit up with the deep, intense love she felt. Then she went on,—

"I can tell you now, because no other ear will ever hear my voice again, and no eye will look into my face to see the shame and sor-

row stamped on it. I can tell you that, had I been told I should become his at the price of my soul, I would have grasped at the chance. To have been with him, to have known that nothing could tear him from me, I should have thought my soul a pitiful price to pay! So my father came for me, and took me home. I was ill for some time. I caught the cold—thank God for it!—that is taking me away now; then, after a time, I seemed to get better, only my cough never left me. My life was very miserable; my father never spoke to me. I never went out for fear of being seen, till at last, one day, just before Christmas, my father told me that he wished me to marry a young man that had before asked me to become his wife. He was kind to me then, and told me he would let the past be forgotten, and that I might still make him happy and be a comfort to him, but if I refused I should leave the disgrace on him that was there through what I had done. So I had not the courage to refuse, and I told him I would do as he wished. Then he was affectionate and kind to me, as in times past. But when he told me to prepare to receive George Cooper as my future husband, my courage failed, and I felt not even for my father's sake could I ever become any one's

wife. Then I asked that he should not call till the following day; and it was so settled; and the morning of that day I left my home again, a second time, never, never more to return! Then I wandered about for days. I do not know where I went. People were very good to me, and each night I got a lodging and food. I offered my services in return, but they were seldom accepted. People are very kind, after all; I found strangers kinder far than friends. At last I got to a big town, and then, after a little difficulty, I got a place in a farmhouse about a mile out of it. I stayed there till I was taken ill, and they wanted me to go to the hospital in Roughton—that was the name of the town—but I wouldn't. I had earned a few pounds, and I knew that would bring me here. I knew I should not live long, and I wanted to die here, where I had last seen *him!*"

Cherry had taken a long, long time to relate her story; the coughing interrupted her frequently, and then a spasm, that every five or ten minutes seemed to seize her breath, would cause her to gasp convulsively, her whole body heaving from the great exertion, and the exhaustion which followed was no longer lessened by the influence of the cordial.

Willie's own feelings it would be difficult to

define. Her heart swelled with deep intense thankfulness at one moment, and then the next sank into despair—despair at the utter hopelessness of her position, created by herself. But this was but a quick, passing sensation; there was no time to dwell on the new phase all had assumed. The poor dying creature lying before her, for the moment, claimed all her attention.

"*You* forgive me, do you?" she asked, looking at Willie with a soft expression; but the eyes were no longer brilliant, a dimness seemed over them, and her voice was much weaker.

"I have nothing to forgive you. Poor Cherry!"

"Oh, yes! I tried so hard to make him love me. I would have taken him from you if I could—but I couldn't!" she added, in so piteous a tone. "I couldn't do that! Oh, that he had loved me for five minutes as he loves you! You know, girls like me—poor girls I mean—do sometimes have real gentlemen to love them, and so I thought he might—because he once said he owed his life to me, and that was like as if he said his life was mine! But say you forgive me!" and Cherry held out her hand, which Willie took and held in hers for a moment.

"Yes, I forgive you," said Willie, feeling she could have spoken the words in a kinder tone and more truthfully had she felt sure that the evil done was not irremediable, though in fact the state of affairs arose through the love of gossip in others, and first started by Mr. Snape, who never particularly liked the family at Treherne Court, owing to the admiral not letting his reverence put his hand into his wife's pocket so frequently or so deeply, by a long way, as he wished, and almost thought himself entitled to do, for he had gone on with his canting talk so long that he almost believed now, from frequent repetition, that what he said was true.

"And tell him so?"

What could poor Willie say but "Yes."

She could not harass the girl at the very moment of dying by telling her the truth, that she was never more likely to see Cyril Treherne than she was herself; that he and she were as surely parted as if Death had stalked in and seized one of them in his relentless grasp—as much parted as Cherry and himself were. It would have been an unnecessary cruelty to have sent her forth out of this weary world, where she had known so little of its pleasures, so much of its trouble, with a burden on her

heart, that would have weighed the more heavily from the knowledge that she alone had wrecked the happiness of the man she loved with a love unto death, and that perhaps, instead of a word of regret falling from his lips when he heard of her being in her grave, he would curse her, and the moment he first saw her, that the kindly feeling and pity he had shown for her would turn to hate and bitterness. No; Willie's heart was too tender to inflict needless pain on any one, much less on one who had sent for her to claim forgiveness for a wrong she had truly endeavoured to inflict, but which she failed in doing.

"Tell him too—but, no—I dare not ask *you* to tell him that!"

"What is it? I will tell him anything you like."

Willie thought she might promise; she felt sure the chance of fulfilling it would never arise, and to comfort and soothe the poor girl was the great object, for she seemed to be strangely agitated, her head rolling restlessly from side to side, her eyes closing and opening almost constantly, and it might calm her if she promised to do anything she wished.

"If there be anything I can do for you, tell me, and I will do it to the best of my power."

"You are very good!" she said, quietly, and closing her eyes. She was still for a minute or two. Every now and then, however, Willie saw her lips move; she did not speak, she thought she might be praying. "Yes, I think you can tell him—there will be no fear then," she said, as if to herself. "You can tell him that I prayed for days and days that I might live to see him once more, to hear him say with his own dear lips that he did not hate poor Cherry Mason; but that God thought fit to take me away before that. I know now—I feel it—my eyes will never see him more in this life—but in the next, who can tell? In the next—is there a next? Oh, there must me, there must be, or we should never be sent here to suffer and suffer, and then die, without anything to be gained by it."

"Oh, do not talk in doubt, Cherry!—it is dreadful to hear you! You must believe God to be a good and loving Father—now watching over you, now waiting to take you to Himself—to bear you away from all your troubles and sorrows to such happiness as you can barely realize now."

"It's very hard to believe it! Why did He take my poor mother—my dear, dear mother—from me when I so needed her? Had she

lived, I should have had her to watch over me —and she would have prevented my doing all the foolish things I did."

And Willie thought she too might have been spared all the misery of the last few months had *her* mother not been snatched from her. Was it a life for a life with the great Creator, or was it that His creatures were mown down as the wheat in the field, the ripe, the unripe, flowers and weeds, all without distinction?

"If I could but feel sure my dear mother was waiting up above there for me—her arms open to receive me, oh, how happy should I be to die! I should have then but one wish, to—go quickly! And yet—I know I haven't long; but then I don't know—I don't know! Oh, God! it's very dreadful!"

"Hush, Cherry, poor girl! You don't seem to think that the very name you call on proves you believe that God is there, and near you; or else why invoke His name? Your soul, unknown to yourself, acknowledges His overruling might and power, and, if so, how can He be near us without being merciful? I do not think He would look down on you at this moment and see you suffering and not bring comfort to you."

"But there's no comfort for me! I feel

none, I see none, in anything. I should so like to have lived; and yet—I know how great a misery is life,—oh, it's all a contradiction; and I don't think I quite know what is right or what isn't—only I want to be at rest. Is death like going to sleep, do you think?" she asked, as if the idea had suddenly occurred to her.

"I do not know; I never saw any one—die," replied Willie, hesitatingly. She shrank from uttering the word; she felt as if she were telling the poor girl that she was dying. "Shall I call Mrs. Cheadle?" she said, seeing a sudden change come over the wan and weary face.

"Not yet—not yet!" she gasped. I—want—to ask you—to tell my father—I did—love him; and I wanted—to see him—but no time—no time!"

Willie rushed to the bell. She saw now, she felt instinctively, the end was at hand, and she could not face death alone. She would have rushed out of the room, but that she was too innately a woman not to force herself to go through a self-imposed duty. But bell there was none. She looked right and left of the bed, and then by the drawers, but uselessly. So she went to the door and called loudly for

Mrs. Cheadle. When she turned back again to the bed, she saw the blood running out of poor Cherry's mouth; the sheets were crimson beside her face, and her eyes—as Willie, with a courage the very graveness of the case gave to her, leant over her and, with her own pocket-handkerchief, endeavoured to stanch the blood that kept welling up in a frightful manner—for a moment gained their former brilliancy; and then she said, softly, so softly no other ear than Willie's could have guessed the name her lips murmured,—

"Cyril! Cyril!—good-bye! I see you—my love—my—"

No other word was heard. In less than a minute after, Mrs. Cheadle came slowly and heavily up the stairs; but by the time she reached the room all was over. Nothing more remained of Cherry Mason but the lifeless body. The spirit had returned, purified by the purging fire of sorrow, to the God who gave it.

There was none to shed the bitter tears of mourning, no head bowed down with woe, no heart throbbing with anguish, over that poor motherless girl; but there was one who, at the very moment when God was recalling her to Himself, was on his knees in his desolate home,

praying that his child, his only one, might never be let perish in the streets; and his prayer was heard. It was his daily prayer—and granted now, though he did not know it.

Dark and thorny had been her path, sad and miserable her lot; but she was at rest now. The lonely grief, the ofttimes fainting heart, the despairing moments when fear alone prevented her taking, with her own hand, the life that God had now Himself claimed, were all past and gone; and she was where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

Willie stood like one turned to stone. She saw Mrs. Cheadle gently and slowly remove the sheets from under the heavy head—so heavy that none can tell how heavy but those whose sorry fate it has been to do a like duty, and then place a clean white towel in its place; she saw her put the two poor thin hands, almost tenderly, across her bosom. One hand was clutching, with the awful grasp of death, the locket suspended round her throat, and it took gentle force to unlock those entwining fingers. Then, for the first time, Willie saw the trinket, and that recalled her to herself, and even in that supreme moment a pang shot through her heart; she felt that it must be

Cyril's gift, or the girl would not have clung to it so; and now she remembered her one hand was never moved from that spot. She asked Mrs. Cheadle afterwards, when they had left the room, if she knew how she came by it, but the good woman could not tell her; she only knew the poor girl had begged her, if she died, not to touch it, not to take it off, and to let her be buried with it—a request that was religiously fulfilled.

A solemn silence seemed to fill the generally bustling and noisy inn. No sooner was it known that Death had taken up his abode at the Rising Sun than the men slunk out of the parlour, as if fearing he might come in amongst them and take some of them in his grasp. Boots wished the poor creature had chosen any other place to die in, and even Mrs. Cheadle would have been glad of any one's company, and plied them with beer gratis, had they undertaken to stay with her through that long wakeful night.

When she saw Willie, muffled up and sitting in the pony-carriage, about to start on her way home, she would have given something to have occupied the vacant seat next to her and leave the Rising Sun till the morning, with the dead alone to keep watch.

The night had turned cold, and the young moon had set; and Mrs. Cheadle thought she had best go in, as she lost sight of the carriage down the road, and take a drop of hot brandy-and-water to comfort her and fortify her nerves.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was about eight o'clock on the same evening as that on which Mrs. Cheadle went to Yardley Wood to fetch Miss Thorpe, that Mr. Snape, who had been sitting about an hour with Cherry Mason, bethought himself of a stroke of business he might possibly accomplish if he exerted himself a little. So he got up gently—Cherry had made semblance of being asleep in order to avoid listening to any more of his reverence's alarming assertions—not to disturb the poor girl, and, going to Boots, told him he had some important business to which he must attend, and that as there was no supper for him there, he must go and get some elsewhere, and then do what he had to do.

But, to do him justice, he did not delay in his errand for the sake of his supper; perhaps he thought where his business took him he might get supper as well as a more substantial

reward; however that may be, he rode as fast as his screw of a horse would carry him to Treherne Court.

"G-a-te!" he cried out lustily, as he reached the old ivy-clad arch. The woman answered very promptly, and recognizing the minister by his black dress, white tie, and bloated face, she admitted him at once; though, like her master, she had no friendly feeling for him. He was better known to her class—not of his congregation—than by the upper.

With a "Good evening!—the family at home, I suppose?" he trotted through, and up the grand old avenue to the porch. The door was closed, and the house shut up for the night, though he saw lights shining through the cracks in the shutters. He got off his horse and rang the bell; a servant in livery replied, but not very promptly; he was about to ring a second time when he appeared.

"I want to speak to Mrs. Treherne," he said. "Will you ask her if she can see me? You know me, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. I'll go and see."

Snape was standing outside, with his horse's bridle over his arm, when Jackson came forward.

"You wish to see Mrs. Treherne, sir?

She 's particularly engaged, and I don't think can see anybody to-night."

"I 'm sorry to disturb her, but I think you had better tell her I am anxious to see her. I have a message from a person she is interested in."

"Well, I 'll tell her," said Jackson, grumpily; "but Mr. Treherne has just arrived, and I know she 'd rather receive no messages, nor visitors either. These Methodists," he continued, to himself, as he crossed the hall on his mission, "they are so pushing; now a right, proper clergyman would never dream of trotting over here at this hour to disturb madam in this sort of manner; and when I told him, too, Master Cyril had just come home."

Admiral and Mrs. Treherne and their son were sitting in the dining-room. The cloth was removed from the table, the beautiful polished mahogany shining like a looking-glass, and reflecting the wine-glasses, decanters, and dishes of fruit that were on it. Mrs. Treherne had moved from the seat she had occupied at dinner, nearer her son—her darling—who had returned after his long absence, that afternoon, in health and strength and safety, somewhat earlier than was expected, but none the less welcome.

"How burnt you are, my boy!" said his mother, passing her hand over his forehead and pushing back his fair curly hair.

He withdrew a little from her embrace, but checked himself in time to prevent it being observable.

"So would you have been, mother, had you been roasting under such a sun as we have had all through what you call the winter. At midday it was blistering."

"It will wear off," said his father, "and if it do not, I don't think he's any the worse for it."

"Worse! No, indeed!" exclaimed the fond mother.

"I wonder if Willie will notice it as much as you do! She'll take me for a red Indian, I'm afraid," he said, laughing. "I am half angry, mother, you prevented me riding over to Yardley Wood this afternoon. I should have been back by dinner, I am quite sure."

"I don't think you would, boy," said his father, Mrs. Treherne not making any reply; "and your mother would have moaned and groaned all the night if you had not spent your first evening at home with her."

"It seems very selfish, dear, I am afraid."

"Well, you won't expect to see me at break-

fast to-morrow. I have ordered Nabob to be brought round at eight."

Both father and mother were silent. Neither had the courage to say a word. They wished to defer telling him till the last moment; and now the admiral resolved to be up before his son, and stay his fruitless journey, and then his mother could give him Willie's letter, which would explain what they dared not utter, and what both now believed to be utterly false.

"Has she been much with you, mother?" asked Cyril, his thoughts still harping on Willie.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Treherne, quite understanding who the "she" meant. But the answer was cold, and made Cyril ask, in a half-anxious, half-vexed tone,—

"And do you like her as much as ever?"

"More than ever, Cyril!" replied his mother warmly. And he was satisfied.

Then they talked of his wanderings by sea and by land, though there was but little of the latter—a day or two here and there, where anything was to be seen. But Cyril had not yet acquired—and it was not natural to him—that love of art which will make men put up with bad quarters and worse fare in order to indulge their taste. He always liked his com-

forts, and he found them almost as perfect on board his yacht as he did at Treherne Court; so no wonder he preferred it to *posadas* and *osterie*, that were all he could expect to meet with along the Spanish and Italian coasts, where foreigners were not sufficient to make the necessity for hotels.

"If you please, madam," said Jackson, interrupting the conversation, "Mr. Snape is here, and wishes to speak to you."

"Snapes be hanged!" cried Cyril. "That man haunts me. He is sure to be here for no good, I'll be bound. I do hope, mother, you do not let him pilfer you as he does every one he can. He is a d—d canting rascal!"

"My dear, dear boy, you're just the same as ever!" was the severest reproof poor Mrs. Treherne dared make to her son so soon after getting him back. Then she went on, "Really, Jackson, it is a very inconvenient hour. Mr. Cyril only just come home, and—"

"Then send him about his business," muttered the admiral.

"Well, stop a moment, Jackson," said madam.

Jackson was going off, but too ready to accept his master's suggestion as an order.

"What do you think he wants? Did he tell you?"

"He said something about the message you gave him."

Whether this time on purpose, or whether he could not help it, Jackson was not better on the score of delivering messages than any of his cloth. I suppose such a thing as a servant delivering a message correctly is as rare as a calm passage between Dover and Calais.

"Shall I go and see, mother?" asked Cyril.

"No, my dear; you would probably swear at the man, and then—"

"No, mother, I won't."

"Well then, go, my dear. It is as broad as it's long, if I must lose sight of you for a few minutes."

So Cyril went, and the admiral and his wife sat for a minute or two in silence. They both wished to speak, yet dreaded to open the subject that weighed down both of them equally. At last the admiral spoke,—

"I must be up early to-morrow."

"You must."

His wife quite understood him.

"Better, I suppose, tell him in the morning. Let him have his first night at home in peace."

"Yes. I will put the letter on my dressing-table, ready for you."

"And they only start to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Will he try to see her first, I wonder?"

"It will depend on what she says, I suppose. Poor boy! And he is so good, so affectionate! I do not understand it; and I do not believe it. He could not appear so anxious to see her if it were true."

"That does not exactly follow. A man may love a woman two ways; the one way would lead him to desire to make her his wife, the other would call forth quite another feeling."

"Men are very strange beings. I never can make them out."

"My dear, men are the simplest beings possible; there is nothing to make out in them. It is women who are enigmas. Why, the wisest man now living has made it his sole study through life—and he is an old man now, older than I am—and he admits honestly he cannot fathom them; they are never the same, never to be depended on; you cannot be sure of them for five minutes; their ways and means are something marvellous; and, in short, they have completely floored him!"

"I think, then, the wisest man now living must be a fool, admiral."

"A fool!—Carruthers a fool! Good heavens! it 's almost blasphemy to couple the word with his name!"

"Well, I never could understand any of Curruthers's writing, so perhaps it may be I am the fool! It does not muchs ignify, either way; we have gone wide from our subject. I wonder what that man has to say, that he is keeping Cyril so long? I think I will go and see."

"You had better stay where you are. It cannot be, I suppose, anything in connexion with this business?" suggested the admiral suddenly, as the thought occurred to him.

"Ah, it might! Snape knew the girl."

"Knew her as he knows every one, by forcing his unwelcome company on her, I take it."

"He may be the bearer of good news," remarked madam.

"How can he? To Cyril, who knows nothing, it cannot be good: no, perhaps he came to convict him to us. He does so delight in holding up evil sky high, that all the world may see it. I hate the religion that delights in mischief and scandal, and loves to see the

speck in the neighbour's eye, but never can see the beam in its own; and that is what your Low Church, canting Methodists, and Plymouth Brethren do. My religion is to hide the fault you see, and to do as you would be done by, and, in short, mind your own business. What right had Snapes to go prying into that man Mason's cottage, and—"

"Well, my dear, he thought, no doubt, it was his duty if he saw wrong going on to try and check it."

"But was he right to make that scene at Stanmore Park last year? Was he right to go gossiping to Mr. Thorpe—"

"Mr. Thorpe sought him."

"Not till he had told a pack of people about what he had no business to let pass his lips; and they of course repeated it, exaggerating the story as it suited them."

"Don't you hear them talking very loudly?" asked Mrs. Treherne, as Cyril's and Snape's voices were heard, both speaking together, in the hall. "I think I 'll go and see—"

"No, no; you stay here, madam. I 'll go. If they were two women, you might see what they were about; but I think I had best go. Cyril may be using the strong language you object to hear."

As the admiral spoke he left the room, shutting the door after him.

"You're a d—d scoundrel!" Cyril was saying.

"Sir, sir, you forget the wrath of Heaven may fall on you," was Snape's reply—"*will* fall on you—will crush you to dust, for such impious words!"

"What's all this about?" mumbled the admiral, chumping his words in his usual way. "What is it, boy?"

"Why, sir," cried Cyril, whose eyes were flashing and his lips white with anger, "this double-faced, double-dealing rascal has been playing such a black, foul game, that I wonder, if he ever attempted anything of the sort before, his skin is whole on his big, coarse body! By Heaven! if you stand there any longer, I'll not answer for the consequences!" and, burnt though his face was, it looked almost pale with the rage working in him. The veins were swollen on his forehead, and his hands clenched as if to deal a blow or keep them under control.

"I—I—didn't—know! Admiral—if you please—hear me!" said Snape, trembling with undisguised fear.

"Let me speak, Cyril, will you? Be calm,

boy, be calm. Remember, your mother is within hearing, and it is not right to subject her to such a scene as this."

"Then let us go outside," said Cyril.

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Snape, more frightened at being at the mercy of his enemy in the open than under shelter of the house; as, if an attempt were made to injure him, his cries would bring help, whereas outside he would be entirely unprotected.

"What is it about?" asked the admiral.

"About—about—Miss—"

"Hold your lying tongue!" cried Cyril, interrupting him. "Get out of this house; and never, if you want to keep a whole skin, dare to put your foot within the lodge-gates, even, again. If you do, by Heaven you'll repent it! And I *never* break my word."

"Yes—sir—yes! I'll go. Good—good evening!"

Snape accepted his dismissal with a gratitude never felt before; for never before had he thought himself so near having his head broken.

"Stay!" said Cyril, darting forward, and laying his hand on Snape's fat arm, which still shook in a miserable manner. He turned round with a crouching, shrinking manner,

and his eyes blinking, as if he expected a blow.

"You said she was at the Rising Sun?"

"Ye-s."

"That will do. Go!"

"Ye-s."

And off he went, as steadily as his fright permitted his legs to carry him, towards the stables, where he supposed he should find his horse. At any rate, he would rather have walked home and sent for it, than have risked going back to the house to inquire where it was. So ended, for Snape, the little stroke of business he had hoped to have been productive of a five-pound note at least.

He went home, he gave up the thought of returning to the Rising Sun; not all the dying souls in Christendom would have induced him to run the chance of coming within sight of Cyril Treherne.

When he was gone, and the hall-door closed, the father and son stood together in silence, each waiting for the other to speak, and yet neither seemed disposed to be the first. At length Cyril, who seemed terribly agitated, said,—

"What is all this, father? What has given rise to the infamous reports that low, canting blackguard spoke of, as if there was no question of their truth?"

"Do you mean with reference to—"

"To Miles Mason's daughter. Who I—so help me God!—have never set eyes on, or even heard of, since I left Treherne!"

"Thank God for it, my dear boy!" said the admiral, his voice faltering slightly from deep thankfulness.

"But was it right of you or my mother to know of the existence of such a falsehood and not tell me of it?"

"I believe all Sandcombe knew it before we did. But your mother can tell you best how it reached her, for she it was who heard it the first. But come into the library, your mother is there; I would not let her come out whilst the man was here. I suspect he is a rascal."

"Suspect! I know it!"

They went to seek Mrs. Treherne, and then all three went into the drawing-room. Not a word was spoken till the door was closed; then Cyril at once reproached his mother with her want of candour. Why not have written to him? Why not have taken some decisive step to prove the accusations against him to be false, and so have silenced his calumniators?

"My dear child, how could I?" The girl's father came here, and said he believed she was

with you; and, you know, before you left there was something."

"Something—yes, but nothing wrong! And now that I am back, she is discovered! Don't you think it is a plot of that impious old hypocrite, either to extort money from us or from some one else? For I do! I would wager a great deal he has thought to line his purse by some diabolical invention—but he reckoned this time without his host."

Cyril was walking up and down the room, his hair brushed back from his sunburnt forehead, showing a white line where the sun's rays had not reached; his hands were in his pocket, and he wondered what mischief had been wrought by his methodistical villain. He had yet to know the worst—a worst he little dreamt of.

"Did you say she is discovered?" asked his mother, hoping from the very bottom of her heart she had not heard aright—for she felt it would be a difficult thing to disprove her having been with him, if on the very day he returned so did she.

"Yes. She is at an inn a mile or two from this."

"How came she there?" asked the admiral, rather sternly, and therefore with less of his

easy-going mumbling way. He, too, thought it looked bad.

"How should I know?" said his son, sharply. "*You* don't suspect me of lying, I suppose, sir; do you?"

"No, Cyril, I do not. But it is an unfortunate coincidence that when you return so should she."

"It may be unfortunate, and is, no doubt; but I cannot help that. She is ill—very ill—dying!"—and his voice softened as he spoke; then suddenly firing up again, "but that may be a lie too, for it was that scoundrel told me."

"It is easy to ascertain the truth," said madam. "Shall we send some one to inquire?"

"No, mother; I shall go myself."

"Oh, do not, Cyril; do not, I implore you!"

"And why not?"

"Because—because it can do no good, and may do harm."

"It can do no harm, mother. There has never been anything between that poor girl and myself I have reason to be ashamed of. I went to see her once or twice; that, and the foolish nonsense men will sometimes talk when they meet a pretty girl in that or any other rank of life, is all that I am guilty of. She

took me in, and probably saved my life, at a moment when there was none other to offer help. I am not going, therefore, to hear she is dying and not go near her."

"Cyril is right, Rebecca. Let the boy go. If evil come of it, he will not be to blame—but it won't. I never knew a man shirk a duty of that sort, that he didn't repent it afterwards."

"I cannot go to-morrow, for I must go over to Yardley Wood the first thing, so I will ride over to Praed Moor to-night."

"Praed Moor!—for what?" exclaimed madam.

"It is on the moor, or rather near it, where the Rising Sun is."

"But it is ten o'clock now," said his mother.

"No, mother, not quite. However, ten or eleven, I must go, and I shall be back in an hour, or an hour and a half, from the time I start. Poor Nabob won't understand having to turn out at this hour. But I will go at once to the stables and order him to be saddled."

"And you think he is right, admiral?" asked his wife, when Cyril had left the room.

"I do, my dear—perfectly. Our son has nothing to hide; then why should he be afraid to act like a man and a gentleman?"

"And Willie's letter?"

"He must have it before he starts for Yardley Wood."

"But how to give it him?"

"Oh, you women understand how to do those things better than we do. Follow your own ideas on the subject."

"When he is gone, then, I will place it on his table in his room; he must see it then, as soon as he returns; but I wish you could have given it him in the morning."

CHAPTER XVII.

Soon after ten o'clock Cyril Treherne was on his road to the Rising Sun. The moon had gone down, and the night was but darkly lit by the stars; still he knew his way so well over every inch of land within miles of Treherne that it did not signify much. And the gloom rather suited than otherwise the humour he was in.

Since he left Cherry Mason, nine months back, on a bed of sickness at the Rising Sun, he had hardly cast a thought on her. Now and then he may have wondered whether she was happy at home, or whether George Cooper had made more way with her since his influence was gone, or if her father was kind to her and had forgotten and forgiven the folly that induced her to leave her home; but they were but passing thoughts, called forth by others nearer his heart and of more moment.

But a day never closed but that Willie Thorpe was constantly occupying him. With all his gay light-heartedness when with others —though he was thought a man without a care to weigh on him, yet, for all that, he carried a constant anxiety about with him. He felt, now that it was too late, he had made a mistake in leaving England. Who could say what influence might be brought to bear, in his absence, to wean Willie's love from him?

He knew her father had no friendly feeling towards him. He felt inwardly convinced he disliked the idea of giving him his daughter. It could be nothing but a matter of personal objection to himself, for he knew well his position was such as to make any one consider him what the world terms a good match. And though he wrote as often as he could, he wrote under restraint, and he fancied she did also. Thus the letters were not the comfort they might have been to him, and they came so seldom.

But when he returned his good spirits and hopeful disposition at once drove away all the bugbears that had been following him about almost the whole time he was away, but more especially during the last few months. His

native air called forth glad thoughts and full confidence.

As he drove in at the gates, and recollected the last walk he took through the plantations that were now looking so bright and green in their spring garb, and called to mind Willie's open, frank admission of her deep love for him, he felt nine months could not diminish it in one so ingenuous and truthful as herself. He went on, trust increasing at every step he neared his home. He was not expected. He had not written at what time, within a day or two, he might arrive. It depended not alone on weather, but also on one of his friends, who wished to see one or two places on the west coast of France, and if they agreed to stop at any of them it would delay them. But once they found themselves, after so long an absence, within a few days of home, the votes were in the majority for pushing on; so they set sail direct for Plymouth.

Both Admiral and Mrs. Treherne were at home, and both in good health. Having, therefore, no drawback thus far, he at once asked about the Thorpes. All his questions were such as could be answered without betraying the truth; and then, when he proposed riding over, if but to tell them of his

arrival, the very natural opposition he met with was in no way likely to kindle the slightest doubt or alarm. No, not even when he learned from Snape that it was generally believed he had been the cause of inducing Cherry Mason to leave her home, and that she had been with him during the last few months, not even then did it cross his mind that, with such a report afloat, it could make any difference in his relations with Willie. It never even occurred to him that she could have heard the rumour, so that he was not troubled on that score as he rode that night across Praed Moor to meet with the darkness of death at the end.

As he reached the inn all was perfectly still. It could not have been more than eleven o'clock, and he thought it strange that the house, from all appearances at other times a very busy one, should be shut up so early. He looked up at all the windows—there were not so many but that he could take them in at a glance—and saw a flickering, reddish light at the upper window on the right-hand side of the house.

"Some one is up, at any rate," he thought. So he knocked at the door with the heavy end of his whip, but there was no answer. He

waited a little, and then rode round to the back, thinking there might be some one moving there, but to no purpose. He returned, and gave another and a louder rap. Then he heard a sudden noise, as if chairs were being upset, and then a tremendous heavy thud on the floor, which shook even the door outside of which Cyril was waiting. "At last," he muttered to himself, "I have aroused some one. It may be poor Boots, who has to sleep on chairs, and has rolled off them."

Still no one came to the door, till a third time he gave a knock that, if any one did hear it, was not likely to be left long unanswered. Then the shutters of the parlour-window were unbarred and partially opened, and Cyril saw the portly figure of Mrs. Cheadle in a costume he had never beheld her in before. Her head was enveloped in a red cotton handkerchief, twisted round and round turban-fashion; and around her person was a kind of dress, a short coloured petticoat, which, on a nearer view, displayed a fair portion of her stockingless legs —legs that an elephant need not have been ashamed of—and a white jacket not carefully closed.

"What a hideous thing is a fat, ugly old woman!" was Cyril's first thought. Then, in

answer to her inquiry as to what was his business and whom he wanted at that hour, he replied, in his cheery voice,—

"Don't you remember me, Mrs. Cheadle—Mr. Treherne?"

"You, sir! Ah, well, you're too late, sir, too late!" and the old wretched-looking object shook her head. She was still standing at the open window, and a candle flaring in her hand.

"Too late! You surely don't mean to say you've turned so good as not to admit any one into the Rising Sun after eleven! It is only that now. Why, you'll be shutting up at sunset next and, according to your sign, opening at sunrise. Come, let me in, old woman. You forget what I promised you if you learned the lesson so hard to a woman—to hold your tongue."

"No, I ain't, sir. Yes, I'll let you in. He may as well come," she muttered, as she trod bare-footed over the sanded floor, to go and open the front door. "He doesn't know—that's clear. What'll you do with your horse, sir?" she asked, as she now stood in full relief at the open door.

"Why, where is Boots?"

"Well, sir, Boots is—occupied. Stay 'a

minute. Yes—all right; I 'll call him. Wait there a moment."

Cyril dismounted and stood stroking his horse's smooth, glossy neck, whilst Mrs. Cheadle disappeared in search of Boots, who, after a minute or so, came forth. He was dressed as usual, and so either had not yet gone to bed, or else night made no difference in Boots' appearance. He looked sleepy, though; but that he generally did.

"Take the gentleman's horse round," said Mrs. Cheadle. "You can wait in the stables till he calls you. Loosen the girths, and give him a drink. I 'll watch"; and a sigh finished the sentence. Mrs. Cheadle put her thumb pointing over her shoulder, and seemed to turn her eyes over it also. However, Boots appeared to understand; and that sufficed. "Now, sir, will you walk in here, please? It 's not in order, it isn't; but I was just taking of a little rest. I 've been rather put about lately."

"Why did you not go to your bed, instead of lying on chairs that seem all to have tumbled about?"

"When you knocked, sir, I didn't quite know what had happened. It awoke me, you see, and I stretched out my hand and caught hold of the table, and it turned over—Lord

have mercy on me—and everything on it!" exclaimed Mrs. Cheadle, seeing no end of things strewn on the floor. "Then, you see, sir, I lost my balance, and fell off them chairs on to the floor, and the chairs on the top of me!"

"I heard you," said Cyril.

"Did you now! Why what a row it must have made!"

"It did—enough to wake the dead."

"No, sir—no, sir, it won't do that."

And Mrs. Cheadle thought Cyril must know about Cherry, and that he must after all be a bad-hearted young man to joke about it in that way.

"Well, Mrs. Cheadle, as you may imagine, I did not ride over here at this hour for the fun of the ride."

"No, sir, of course. Please be seated, sir."

And Mrs. Cheadle handed one of the chairs that had been upset to her visitor; and then, for the first time appearing to recollect she was but indifferently covered, she took the blanket, which like everything else was on the floor, and threw it over her knees, and a green shawl round her shoulders. If not more fascinating, she was at any rate more draped.

"So I hear," said Cyril, sitting astride of

the chair presented to him, "that poor little Cherry Mason has come back to you."

"Aye, sir, and gone again, poor dear!"

"Gone! why that old devil Snapes told me she was ill; and so I determined to ride over and see her, though I have not been home twelve hours. The scoundrel! he shall pay for this. How long was she with you?"

He put the question in his ordinary tone of voice, but the former part of his speech was muttered to himself.

"Little better than three weeks, sir."

"And did her father know she was with you?"

No, sir, he knew nothing—nothing, poor man!"

"I am afraid he was not kind to her, and that drove her to leave her home again, Mrs. Cheadle."

"It wasn't exactly that, sir; it was that he wanted to make her marry a young man, a good sort of fellow, I believe, but the poor dear couldn't abide him."

"And do you know where she is gone?" Mrs. Cheadle nodded her head slowly. "Is it far—is she in good keeping?"

"Yes, sir; the best there be. She's gone up to heaven."

"Good God! dead—is she dead?" and Cyril started up from his chair.

"Aye, that she be, sir. She died here this blessed night, well nigh two hours ago."

"This night—here—only two hours ago! Are you sure?"

"Too sure, sir; too sure!"

Then there was a pause, a long silence. The news fell like a clap of thunder on Cyril. That young, bright, strong, healthy girl dead! He could not realize it; it seemed impossible.

"Will you like to see her, sir?" asked Mrs. Cheadle at last. She wondered how much longer Mr. Treherne meant to stand there, neither speaking nor moving.

"Yes," he replied, curtly, and turning as if to follow the old woman at once.

She led the way up the old rickety stairs; there was no need to be quiet now, but she endeavoured to make as little noise as possible, creeping up, and Cyril following with a confused idea of what he was about to do.

His eyes fell on the bed; there was nothing visible but a raised mass beneath the sheet. Mrs. Cheadle lifted the covering from the face, and there lay the lifeless body of Cherry Mason.

Cyril gazed on the white face; he seemed

incapable of taking his eyes off it; he stood there, never moving the least in the world, his hands clenched, and his teeth set firm; what he suffered during those brief moments none can tell, but presently he turned round to Mrs. Cheadle, his face almost as white as that of the dead girl before him, and asked her to leave him alone. She went at once, glad enough to go; with all her goodness of heart she could not endure to be up there. She would have had the poor body taken away, put in the stables, anywhere, so great was her horror of a corpse, but that she thought her motive would be misunderstood, which it undoubtedly would. So she thankfully complied with Cyril's request.

He shut the door when she was gone, and then he knelt down by the bedside, and, burying his face in his two hands, he implored God's forgiveness if he, by any light, careless words, had in the least degree helped to bring about this terrible ending. His conscience smote him; he knew for love of him she had left her home the first time, and he knew he had deliberately tried to win her admiration. All the little scenes that had passed between them now came up before him; he remembered with painfully vivid distinctness that time when

he told her to kiss him, and how her whole soul seemed on her lips as she complied. That ought to have warned him; he ought never to have seen her again, never more to have gone near her. Then the locket, and the unlucky meeting with that man, who seemed his evil genius; and then he lifted his eyes, hardly aware that he did so, to see if the little trinket was around her neck. He saw it instantly, and he buried his face once more. Then his lips moved again in earnest prayer, and then he rose up; he looked at the wan, thin face; there was little left of the Cherry of a year ago but the hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows; the eyes he could not see, and he thought what misery she must have endured to have become such a wreck!

He stooped down and kissed her forehead; its icy coldness caused a shiver to pass through him; then he covered the face over as it was before, and slowly went downstairs into Mrs. Cheadle's room.

Perhaps the poor girl's spirit knew and rejoiced over that last kiss Cyril Treherne gave to the dead; if so, death had indeed for her lost its sting, for she would have died willingly had she been assured of it beforehand.

"Mrs. Cheadle," said Cyril, "does her father know?"

"No, sir; how could he?"

"But you ought to have sent to him immediately you knew there was real danger."

"She wouldn't let me; she knew she was dying—the doctor told her so this morning: and then I wanted to send for her father, but she begged me not; she said, 'Better he should never see her again; she had been an ungrateful child, and he would never forgive her.' She only wanted to see one person."

"Who was it?—me, I suppose."

"No, not you; that is, she did, poor dear, want to see you, and she prayed so hard she might live to see you, if only for a minute. No, it was Miss Thorpe she wanted to see."

"Miss Thorpe! What could she want with her?"

"I don't know, sir; but she seemed to want her terribly bad, and after her begging me till she at last brought on one of those awful fits of coughing, of which I thought every one would be the last, I consented, and I went for her."

"You went for her?"

"Yes, sir; I walked over to Yardley Wood, a long walk for a weighty woman like me, but I couldn't send no one else, for I didn't sup-

pose she'd come for me, and therefore much less for Boots or the like of him."

"But she didn't come?"

"But she did, though, sir! She drove over at near eight o'clock, and took me in the carriage by her side; and she stayed here with the poor dear till she died."

"Willie Thorpe with Cherry Mason!" exclaimed Cyril to himself. "What a good, darling little soul she is! I wonder what poor Cherry wanted her for? No harm, I am sure, for she cared for me too well to try and injure me, supposing she could. And do you know why the poor girl wished you to fetch Miss Thorpe?—had she ever seen her before?"

"I know nothing, sir; that is, I do know the poor soul had never seen Miss Thorpe till to-night; but why she so wished to see her I can't tell you, for she asked me to leave them alone."

"Then when did Miss Thorpe leave here?"

"About half an hour before you came, sir."

"Ah, well, perhaps it was better for us not to meet here," murmured Cyril; "though she would not, I am sure, have misunderstood my coming. How do you propose to let Mason know about this terrible business?" asked

Cyril, after thinking over the question himself.

"I really don't know, sir; but I do wish he knew it, and that some one who knows him would break it gently to him, for it will strike him hard, depend upon it. A child may be good or bad, but a parent will feel its death for all that."

"I'll go, Mrs. Cheadle," said Cyril, with sudden determination.

"You'll do a good deed, sir, if you will. You'll go early, sir?"

"There's my difficulty. I am engaged,—an engagement I cannot break,—from eight till eleven to-morrow morning. Let me think a moment. Yes, I'll do that! I will go now—at once. I know my way well enough, even though the night is dark; and then it will be half breaking it to him without speaking. He will know that no one would ride across the moors in the middle of the night as the bearer of good news."

"God bless you, sir; you're very good! How that poor thing we have just left upstairs would have rejoiced could she have known that you would have been here to-night—dead though she might have known she was to be!"

"Perhaps it is better she did not; at least,

it is as well to think so. I'll go round and get my horse and—"

"And send Boots in, please, sir,—directly, please!"

"All right; and I will see you again soon."

"Very well, sir; but wait, if you please. Let me hold the candle for you. You can never see along that dark passage."

"Yes, I can. Don't come out, Mrs. Cheadle; you'll catch your death of cold if you go about like that."

But Mrs. Cheadle, heedless of the advice offered to her, insisted on not alone going down the dark passage, but moreover standing at the open door, her light garment fluttering about her legs, in the cold night air, till Boots made his appearance. It seemed the longest five minutes she ever passed in her life, waiting there for that abominable servant of all work. But he came at last, shuffling in, and his head looking as if he had taken a good, comfortable rest in the hay.

And then was heard the clear, ringing sound of Nabob's feet, as he went trotting with a good will down the road, till he was lost in the distance or from his having turned off on to the silent turf.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The ride from Praed Moor to Shelton was a good twelve miles, and not to be done under two hours in a dark night; for, though Cyril knew his way, he knew also that the ground was such he must ride cautiously if he wished to run no risk of accidents.

"What a shocking blow to the poor father will be the news I am bearing to him!" he thought, as he was going at a leisurely pace up a steep, uneven ascent. "Surely nothing could be worse!"

And then he pondered sadly over the girl's death, with thoughts that were a strange mixture of regret, remorse, and thankfulness. He regretted her young life having been so miserably wrecked; that one so young, so beautiful, and, when he first crossed her path, so happy should have suffered such a sudden blight. Then came remorse at his own share

in the change his becoming acquainted with her had wrought in her and all around her; and though the extent of his wrong had been talking nonsense and taking a kiss, yet he had talked the nonsense in such a way that his words stirred up feelings in her heart hitherto unknown to her; and he had taken the kisses so that to her they were like putting a torch to a smouldering fire, that only required the surface to be touched for the hidden flames to burst forth. And when he found the mischief he had created it was too late; nothing could stay the wild passion he had called into life.

Then a feeling amounting almost to thankfulness came over him that—not alone for his sake, but her own—she was removed from the turbulent life, the incessant harassing existence, hers, at best, under the circumstances, could have been. The very steps she had taken proved how hopeless it would have been to have expected her to be guided by reason. Nothing would she have listened to but the dictates of her own unhappily directed heart. Her love for Cyril filled her whole being; it absorbed every other feeling, and by it alone would she have been influenced.

It was striking three o'clock when Cyril reached the little village of Shelton. Its in-

tense lifelessness was painful; there were not even those faint glimmering lights that are seen through curtainless windows here and there in almost any village at any hour of the night,—some one is wakeful, either watching the sick, waiting for some one to return home, or attending a young child; but in Shelton it appeared as if every one must be in sound health, no one absent, and not a baby in the place: at least so thought Cyril. He passed through slowly, as if to do so as quietly as possible, yet the echo of his horse's feet sounded ten times more distinctly there, in the midst of sleeping life, than across the wild moors and over the deserted roads. He was glad when he was out of it, and descending the road that led to Mason's cottage. Looking far across the sea to the horizon, he fancied he saw towards the east a pale streak that betokened the coming day. He stood still for a moment watching it, but time was precious, and he neither saw it increase nor disappear; it required patience for the former, and he could not then afford to tax it.

On reaching the little cottage Cyril for the first time bethought himself that any living man's presence would be more welcome to Miles Mason than his. But now he could not

go back without fulfilling his mission, nor could he at that hour find a substitute. The young man, George Cooper, flashed across his mind, but he could not find him without returning to the village and awakening half of the inhabitants; and then it would be an unnecessary piece of cruelty to inflict on a poor fellow who had already through him—however regretted—suffered the greatest wrong that another could inflict on him. So Cyril rode up to the door, dismounted, fastened his horse up to a ring he found outside the window, then knocked distinctly three times.

Mason's voice at once called out, "Who's there?"

"I, Mason—Mr. Treherne. I wish to speak to you."

There was no answer, but Cyril waited patiently a minute or so, judging rightly that Mason was coming. Presently he heard his step approaching, and the next the door was unfastened. All was dark within.

"What do you want?" he asked, gruffly.

"I must come in: I cannot tell you what I want standing out here. It is not likely I should come and disturb you at this hour for nothing."

"Come in, then," he replied, in the same

tone. "Wait till I get a light, or you'll be stumbling over the things."

So Cyril waited. Then when he saw the little bright flame produced by the match, which instantly illumined the entire room, so dark had all been before, he walked in, and stood silently by till Mason had lighted the candle, and, turning round again, asked him his business.

"I have come, Mason," said Cyril, feeling his courage ebb now he was face to face with the man on whom he was about to bring such a crushing weight of woe, "as the bearer of news—not good news, Mason."

Cyril paused. He saw Mason's hard, rough hand clutch at the table, and noticed the sudden compression of the lips. Did he guess the truth, he wondered? He hoped he did.

"Well, go on," said the man, after a moment. "You have never shown your face here but a curse followed."

"Cannot you guess what I have to tell you?" asked Treherne, not heeding the man's bitter remark. He could make any allowance for him now that he felt he was bringing desolation to his heart.

"How can I guess? Something in connexion with that—"

"Stop, Mason! Don't in your anger utter words which five minutes hence you would cut your tongue out sooner than have spoken."

"Where is she?" he growled out between his teeth.

"Where she was when you fetched her home before."

"And you took her there again?" His eyes looked fierce and menacing.

"No, she went there herself."

"D—n you!" he hissed out.

"She was there three weeks," said Cyril, calmly and steadily, heeding the man's rage no more than he would that of a helpless child. "I only returned to-day, or rather yesterday."

"What does she want?"

"Nothing now."

"I won't have her here again! She shall never pollute the home her mother lived in by placing her foot across the threshold."

"She never will, Mason."

There was something in Cyril's tone that at last roused the man from his own angry passion. He looked up; the quiet face, the pitying look, the calm manner, all struck him now.

"What did you come for?" he asked now, less bluntly.

"I came to tell you about her. She has

been very, very ill. I heard it a few hours ago only. I heard where she was, and though I had not been home many hours I thought I might be of some service to her; for I knew she would not be away from here if all were right."

"Away from here! Didn't you tempt her away!" he roared out, all his fury returning.

"No, Mason, I did not. I never saw her till to-night, since I saw you here to tell you she would return to her home nine months ago."

"You lie! I say, you lie!"

The man's face was livid with rage.

"Stop! I can bear much, and will bear much; but there is a limit, and you must not pass it."

Cyril spoke calmly, but very sternly. It was a hard ordeal he was going through, but he kept his temper; he knew well he was the original cause, though not wilfully, of all the sorrow that had fallen on Mason's peaceful, happy home.

"Well, you saw her?"

"I did. I saw her—"

"Yes—and—and she—she was?—tell me!"

"Dead!"

Mason knew, before the awful word fell slowly and distinctly from Cyril's lips, that his child

was no more. He knew he was alone in the wide world, with none to love, even though he had heaped curses and blessings alternately on his poor child's head. Alone! That was all he realized for the moment. He thought he had been alone before, but now he found out it was not so. He had some one to think about, some one to pray for, some one who, in his great love, he was hoping and praying might come back, might come in the dead of the night, as came now the dread news, unexpected, to ask to be taken back to his arms, to be sheltered by him from all further sorrow.

Slowly his weather-beaten face, aged now with care more than years, fell down till it rested on his two arms, which were on the table he was sitting by. Cyril neither spoke nor moved. He watched the poor wretched father in his agony, and felt that any word now would be worse than vain. Better to leave him till the bitter anguish was relieved by tears, which he hoped would come to dull the sharp edge of his woe. But the time passed, and the man never moved. That faint streak Cyril had seen in the eastern sky had now spread all over the broad expanse of the heavens, a grey light came through the

window, and slowly every object in the room was tinged with the white light of day.

Presently Cyril, who had had time for reflection, felt that, with all he had to do before him, he must think of returning home. Yet it was terrible to leave the man in his then state. Kindly and softly he laid his hand on his shoulder. Mason quivered at the touch, and started up. He gazed at Treherne for a moment with a vacant stare; then he seemed to recollect why he was there. His face was ghastly pale, but his eyes were dry. Not a tear had come to his relief. He seemed suddenly to have become an old man, with a look of utter helplessness over his countenance.

"I am afraid I must leave you, Mason," said Cyril.

"Dead, did you say?" he asked, with quivering lips, "dead?"

"Yes, my poor fellow, and freed from any more trouble." Cyril recollected the old hackneyed phrase, which is no comfort, and never will be. "You must try and rouse yourself. You must go to where she is. You will like to see her, will you not?"

"Who was with her? Did she not ask for me?"

"I cannot tell you. But Miss Thorpe was with her. She sent for her."

"Miss Thorpe! Who is she?"

"My future wife."

"Your future—with *her?* Then isn't it true that you took her from me, that you—"

"No—so help me God! Cherry Mason was as pure as fresh-fallen snow. The only wrong I ever knew her guilty of was leaving her home. You know best why she did so the second time."

"Pure and virtuous! Oh, thank God, thank God!—I can bear my misery better now, it seems less crushing; and yet—and yet—oh, my child, my child!"

And now the pent-up tears were let flow; they trickled down the rough, weather-beaten face, till at last, with a moan as of excruciating pain, he buried his face and sobbed like a child. Presently he became a little calmer.

"I don't feel like a man any longer, Mr. Treherne. I feel as weak as a woman," he said, trying to remove the traces of his tears. "It's a fearful blow, and will soon finish me: and so much the better; what is life to me without *her!*"

"You must try and exert yourself a little now, Mason."

"Yes, sir; I will. I ask your pardon, sir

can you forgive me? I believed you had injured her. I knew she—poor foolish thing—loved you, and I know gentlemen don't think they act wrongly by a poor girl when the same conduct would ruin them with a lady. And then my duty took me so much away, and I used to find her so different after she knew you. Well, well, there 's no use in recalling all that now; poor little one! Oh, my dear one, if I could but whisper in your ear my prayers for your forgiveness! If I could but hear you say you forgave me all my harshness, I could bear it better!"

Once more the poor bereaved father laid down his head and wept long and bitterly.

"Come, Mason, you are giving way too much: try to face this blow dealt you by God's hand, and submit manfully."

"Why did God give me a child, if He meant to snatch her from me like this? First her mother—then herself!"

"And have you never during the last few months prayed to God to take her?"

"If I did it was because I thought her doing wrong."

"Then you should have left it all in God's hands, not turn round upon Him now because He has done as you asked."

It would have done Mrs. Treherne's heart good to have heard her son talking to the poor coastguardsman in his deep sorrow. The truth was he had hit, by a lucky chance, the right nail on the head, and so was able to argue against Mason's wrongful murmurings. It was now past five o'clock, broad daylight, and a lovely morning.

"I must go, Mason. I left home at ten last night, and they expected me back by twelve. But I could not go back till I had seen you. I thought I could tell you better than that fellow there at the Rising Sun; besides he probably would never have found his way here. When can you go? You see, some one must attend to certain arrangements. I will, if you like; only if you can go over at once that old woman, Mrs. Cheadle—you remember her—will be relieved. She, of course, can do nothing till you have been."

"Yes, I see. Of course. My duty begins at five; it's past the hour now; but I'll go and see if I can't get another fellow to take my place. Some one will, I am sure, when he knows the reason I ask him."

"Well, do so at once, and then go."

"How far is it, do you think, sir? I forget; and yet it seems as if every step of the road

was stamped on my memory. Then—then, I went to bring her home, and now! Oh, my God—my God! Why are we mortals so afflicted! Why can't we die before shame and sorrow befall us? You saw her, sir?"

"Yes, Mason."

"And was she—was she much altered?"

"She was—terribly altered?"

"What killed her?"

"Rapid consumption. I hear her cough was dreadful."

"Ah, I remember it was so here, before she left the—last time."

"Now I want to see you off, Mason, before I start," said Cyril, after a pause. "Dress as quickly as you can, or it will be six before you are on your way."

Slowly and reluctantly Mason got up. He seemed like a man suffering some dreadful bodily pain, and feared to move lest he should increase it. When he was in his own room, and the door closed, Cyril for the first time sat down and looked about him, then he saw the changed appearance of the little room that was always so neat and comfortable; but the hand that made it so was now cold and dead! He seemed to see Cherry sitting in the chair by the window, trying her best to attend to

her needlework, whilst he was talking foolish words to her. Ah, how he regretted having, for the mere gratification of the moment, indulged himself at what proved so terrible a price! He saw her again standing over that poor hulking fellow, George Cooper, and sewing a button on for him, and the flushed face and the great wondering eyes when he stood at the door and she caught sight of him. He recollected how she almost cried when he told her she must care for that man. And had he not greedily accepted the love he saw was so simple, yet so intense, when he knew he had none, and never could have, to give in return! Would she be now lying dead at an inn, an outcast from her home, and her father broken hearted, but for him!

Whilst these thoughts were running through Treherne's mind, Mason was on his knees imploring for resignation, and trying to utter from his heart a verse from a hymn he had always much liked, and now the words rose to his lips,—

> "If Thou shouldst call me to resign
> What most I prize, it ne'er was mine;
> I only yield Thee what is Thine:
> Thy will be done."

But not yet; submission to His will came not

then. He rose from his knees with rebellion uppermost; it was not till he stood over the dead body of his only child—his darling, his one earthly treasure—that he thoroughly gave in. The very intensity of his anguish rendered him yielding to God's will, and he acknowledged that though His ways were not ours they were best.

But Cyril saw nothing of this. He only knew the man's spirit seemed broken, and his heart too, and he longed to get away from the spot where reproaches would force themselves, and where he could not crush them down, for he felt they were merited. But he had ample time for reflection, for it was long before Mason returned, and Cyril did not dare to disturb him. It was one of those moments in his life that no living being would have ventured to have broken in on. But he came at last, looking clean and well in his best uniform; but his face bore the traces of the ordeal he had gone through—traces never to be effaced till that destroying hand that obliterates all should pass over him.

"I am ready, sir," he said, in a quiet, composed manner.

"Do you lock up the cottage?" asked Treherne.

"Yes, sir; if you will go out, I will do that. Your horse must be weary standing there all this time; I didn't think of him, poor beast!"

"Oh, he will be all right; it isn't cold, you know, and it isn't often he has this sort of work."

"No—no," said Mason, in a dreamy tone. "Once in a lifetime is enough for such a night as this has been, isn't it, sir?"

"Indeed it is, Mason. My poor fellow, I wish I could go with you, but it is impossible."

"When shall I see you again, sir?"

They were walking on now, Cyril leading his horse.

"Would you like me to help you in any way? I don't like to make offers that might seem obtrusive; but anything in the world I can do I will."

"I feel so broken down, sir, that I shall be thankful for any one to help me; and you know all about it, and all the sorrow and sh—"

"No, Mason; that word must not be spoken in connexion with her."

"No, not to her, sir; you gave me your word—you called God to witness, did you not? You're not deceiving me?"

"No, I am not. Do you wish me to repeat it?—on my honour as a gentleman I swear—"

"No need, sir, no need. I believe you, and God alone knows how thankfully! It was the shame *I* had felt, and the sorrow I had endured, I was going to say. I should like her to be laid in our little churchyard yonder, beside her poor mother; and *she* would have wished it, I know, for she dearly loved her mother."

"She did. I well recollect her telling me so, one of the days I was lying in your room after the wreck. There is no reason why your wish should not be gratified."

"She 'd be near to me, and I could look after the grave," said the poor man, with quivering lips.

"And she shall be there."

"But it 's a long way to—to bring her."

"I 'll see to that." And Treherne was glad to have it in his power to do anything that might give even a shadow of comfort. "Shall I find you at home to-morrow?"

"I shall be on my beat, sir, all to-morrow; but if you 'll tell me about the hour you 'll be here I 'll be on the look-out."

Cyril considered for a moment; he did not know how his visit to Yardley Wood might hamper his future time; but at any rate this was a duty not to be neglected for his own

pleasure, and he was quite sure Willie would enter into the business with him, doubly so now that she had been mixed up in it herself, though that still puzzled him much; but he had scarcely time just now to dwell on himself and what concerned him.

"I will be with you at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"Very good, sir; I'll be within a stone's throw of the cottage at that hour."

"Now I must say good-bye, Mason," and Treherne held out his hand, which the man grasped willingly. "Good-bye; try and keep up. I am a poor hand at offering comfort—we men all are; but recollect you have this to console you, that she is near at hand, and you can do for her—sad though the work is—what you would have bitterly regretted had strangers or, worse still, the parish, had to do. Recollect also you might never, in that case, have known what had become of her. That would have been worse yet, would it not?"

"It would. You're right, sir. Good-bye, sir."

And Miles Mason turned off to the left, skirting the high sand cliffs, till he reached the moorland, over which there was a foot and bridle path leading to the Rising Sun inn.

Cyril mounted and watched Mason for several minutes; then, turning his horse's head in the opposite direction, he put him into a trot, and made for Treherne.

He was thankful the business, so far, was over; bad as it was, he got through it better than he had anticipated; and now that it no longer weighed on him he began to feel the fatigue his unremitting labours since ten o'clock on the previous night had produced. Not alone the bodily exertion he had gone through, but the strain upon his nerves also began to tell, and he could hardly keep his eyes open whilst sitting on his horse.

It was past seven o'clock when he re-entered the gates at Treherne. He heard the old man mumble something about watching the gates all night, but he was too weary even to nod his usual greeting. He went on up the old avenue till he reached the house. A servant was washing the stone steps: he desired her to ring the bell, and then slipped off his horse more like a drunken man than aught else.

"Here, hold the reins till some one comes," he said to the astonished maid; "and tell—oh, here, James," he continued, seeing the footman coming across the hall in shirt-sleeves and a long white apron, "take Nabob round; tell

Fryer, the poor fellow has had a hard night's work, and he must give him a mash, and put him in a loose box, and make him comfortable; tell him also I shall be round myself presently, to see that he is all right."

And then Cyril, without another word, went to his room. He never stopped to do more than kick off his boots and pull off his coat; and then he threw himself on to his bed, and, before he could think whether his father and mother had been anxious about him or not, he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

Admiral and Mrs. Treherne had wisely gone to their beds, and not sat up for their son, as madam had wished to do till the admiral reasoned her out of such a piece of folly; so it was not till the next morning, and after his return, that they learnt he had been absent all night.

At ten o'clock the admiral was fidgeting in the dining-room, because his wife and son were not down. The gong had sounded, and at the same moment he laid aside the newspaper. About two minutes after Mrs. Treherne came in.

"My dear, can you not be punctual? Did you not hear the gong?" asked the admiral.

"To be sure I did; I must be deaf indeed if I did not. But I was asking about Cyril; and, after all, I am not a minute late."

"You are two minutes and three-quarters late. Isn't Cyril coming?"

"No; he is sound asleep. I went to his room and, knocked, and, as I got no answer, I opened it; there he was on his bed, his two hands under his head, so fast asleep that, though I spoke to him and called him, he never moved."

"The best thing is to leave him alone and let him get his rest out. He ought to have told us he would not be home all night: keeping the servants up, and the old people at the lodge; it is very inconsiderate. But young men are inconsiderate," added the admiral, good-naturedly. He was mollified by the recollections of his own young days. "Let us have our breakfast, at any rate."

"My dear, that letter was on his table, and unopened: I looked," said madam, in a solemn manner.

"Well, he'll find it when he awakes. So much the better, perhaps; they will have started long before he will get there."

Mrs. Treherne thought otherwise, but she did not say so, and the subject was let drop. After breakfast she made another attempt to rouse her son, but with no better result. It was three o'clock before he awoke, and then with

such a feeling of languor that he felt disposed to turn round and sleep again; but before doing so he looked at his watch; it had run down—he had forgotten to wind it before starting on what turned out to be a long ride indeed. So he had to rise; he could not bear to be in ignorance as to whether it were morning, noon, or evening.

At the end of a long corridor at the top of the back stairs was a large clock; this was the nearest to him; so he went, as he was, to see the hour, and finding it to be ten minutes past three he resolved to dress. He rang his bell, and gave orders for his bath to be prepared.

Whilst waiting he went to the window, and drawing back the curtains threw it open. The sun was shining hotly over the fine old trees; there was nothing refreshing in the air, such as one feels in the early morning; the day had worn itself half out, and seemed heavy and still. He turned away, intending to lie down again, when his eye fell on the letter that was placed on the dressing-table. At first he thought it must be from his mother—a lecture for being out all night. So he opened it with a half-amused smile; but he no sooner saw the signature, and rapidly read its contents, than

his whole countenance changed. There was a bewildered expression, as if he imagined he might be dreaming. He held the letter in his left hand, and with his right he brushed back the thick fair curls that had fallen over his forehead. Then he sat down and read the letter through again, slowly and deliberately, and he understood it all! But how the letter came there was a mystery; he was certain it was not there when he left the previous night. Had his going out anything to do with it? No—the date proved that not to be the case; it was dated two or three days back. At the first blush he rather slighted the matter.

"Darling little Willie!" he said to himself; "she has heard these ridiculous stories, and is jealous, but I shall put all that right in five minutes; and as to her going away, it's all trash and folly!"

He dressed quickly, and then went down in search of his mother. She, no doubt, would be able to explain much to him that was not comprehensible. He found her in the library, sitting over her account-books, her spectacles on, and her thin, busy-looking face absorbed in her household matters.

"My dear boy, I thought you were never going to wake again!" she said, as he went

in. "Are you rested, dear? How could you stay out all night without telling us!"

"My dear mother, I knew no more than you did, when I went out, that I was likely to be detained; and you will be sorry to hear the cause, I am sure. Poor Cherry Mason is dead!"

"Cherry Mason dead—and her father?"

"Did not know it, and I had to go and break the news to him; so I have not had a pleasant night of it, as you may imagine."

"But, Cyril, my dear son, I—I really understand nothing. Poor Mason!—poor man!—what an awful calamity to lose a child!"

Mrs. Treherne could feel that. As she looked at her only one—her idol—she thought nothing on God's earth could strike such misery into the human heart as the death of a child. Then there was a pause.

"Mother," said Cyril, presently, "who put that letter on my dressing-table this morning?"

"I did. I put it there after you left last night, thinking you would be home early, and off to Yardley Wood before I saw you."

"And you know its contents?"

"Yes."

"And why did you not give it me as soon as

I arrived, for I see it was written some days ago?"

"Your father and I thought it would be soon enough."

"No, you can never tell bad news too quickly; though I can scarcely make this out sufficiently to call it bad. You saw her, did you?"

"Yes."

"And what possessed her to write that letter?"

"She believed that poor girl you say is dead to have been with you; and she thought, therefore, you could not care for her."

"Mother, she was with Cherry Mason when she died last night."

"Well, my dear, I am sure I trust and pray all may turn out right in the end; but everything is to me so inexplicable that I really cannot make it out. Had you told me *I* had been with the poor thing when she was dying I should not have been one atom more astonished than I am at hearing Willie was."

"Well, I confess I am equally surprised," said Cyril. "However, I will go over to Yardley Wood presently, and no doubt all will be cleared up."

"Yes, my dear, but—but don't you think—Well, do as you like."

"What were you going to suggest, mother?"

"I hardly know, Cyril, I am so bewildered." And Mrs. Treherne spoke truly—she was bewildered.

The admiral now came in. "A nice way of spending your first night on land, Cyril!" he said, half jokingly, half seriously.

"I was explaining to madam, sir, the dreary work I had to attend to. I am sorry any one was kept up, but it could not be helped. That poor girl is gone, admiral!"

"Gone? Where the devil has she gone to now? She's always going."

"Gone her last journey, sir," said Cyril, quietly.

"Bless my soul! not dead?"

"Yes—dead."

"Ah, well, it strikes me it would have been better had she died before you were wrecked, or you had waited to be wrecked till after she was dead. But there's no help for these mismanaged events. I am afraid she is dead a little too late for any good result." He mumbled the last words more than usual, so that his son did not catch them.

Cyril explained to his father how it was that he felt almost obliged to undertake the mission to poor Mason, and how that detained him through the whole night. "I am vexed I slept so long," he continued; "for instead of getting to Yardley Wood for breakfast, I shall scarcely get there before their dinner hour. However, it cannot be helped."

"And you intend going there, notwithstanding—"

"Notwithstanding Willie's letter? Most assuredly. She wrote it, no doubt, under the impression you all seem to have been under; and I confess I think my own parents, at any rate, might have given me credit for conduct a little less dishonourable."

"It was not that, my darling boy. But you know there was a mystery, and you did not tell us anything, and—"

"Simply because I had nothing to tell."

"Yes. You don't recollect, perhaps; but when that poor girl's father came here the day before you were about to start, he then said she was with you."

"His saying so did not, however, make her to be so. But I dare say it will all come right, and that this is only a temporary annoyance—for annoyance it is, to say the least of it."

The father and mother looked at each other. They did not know what to say. They were unequal to the occasion, so they were silent.

"Can I have breakfast at once?" asked Cyril, presently; "though, for the sake of sound, I had better call it luncheon."

"Assuredly, my dear," said madam, rising and opening the door that led across the hall to the dining-room. "I should think they would have left the table ready for you if they have a grain of sense—but servants have none, as a rule."

"Don't you bother, mother; I'll go and see about it myself." And Cyril followed his mother out of the room.

"They'll be gone," mumbled the old admiral, now left to himself, and pacing slowly up and down the library, a large room, well suited for exercise, both of the mind and body. "They'll be gone, and then what will he do? I know what I should; but young men in the present day are not what they used to be in mine. They have not the chivalry or the devil-may-care spirit that would make them go to the world's end in pursuit of what they thought worth having. Now, my fine gentleman sits down with his eyes shut, and waits for the sweet to be dropped into his open

mouth. I suppose it 's the fault of education of one sex or the other. Girls are not shy now as they used to be thirty years ago. It is *they* who run after the men; and the men, it appears to me, try to keep out of their way. That 's why I am so grieved at this rupture with that pretty, gentle girl. She is one of the old sort; so frank and simple, and yet with plenty in her if you talk seriously to her. Thorpe has certainly brought her up well. I, with my old-fashioned ways, rather dreaded a Frenchified daughter-in-law; but, confound it! she 's worth more than any of those fast young women round about here who have been brought up in England."

"I 'm off, father," cried Cyril, putting his head in at the door, looking bright and cheery and hopeful.

"Very well, my boy. God bless you!" replied the old man.

And so Cyril started on his way. The afternoon was warm and close; not a breath of wind stirred the leaves, but there was that oppressive summer-like feeling that at times depresses the spirits and causes discomfort. The buzzing of the insects, the singing of the birds, the glare of the sun, the dust on the roads, do not affect you if you are sitting still beneath the shadow

of some thick-foliaged, wide-spreading branches of a tree; but if you are obliged to trot along a shadeless way, with a cloud of dust enveloping you, making your dark clothes look grey, and filling your eyes and ears and mouth, and if the flies will keep in a cloud around your horse's head, now and then mistaking yours for his, and making you feel it, then a hot afternoon is not so agreeable. It is only the birds that do not annoy you; their voices would be rather pleasant, but, with the noise of your horse's feet, you only catch the sound by snatches. So Cyril was not sorry when he neared the woods that gave their name to William Thorpe's property.

Yet, pleasant as the change was to man and beast, he did not linger on the road; he walked for a little to let his horse get cool, and then he trotted on till he came up to the lodge gates; they were open, so he rode in without seeing any one.

The road to the house wound very much, so that it is not visible till you come within a few hundred yards of it. Then Cyril perceived a stillness, a want of life, that struck a chill to his heart—he could not say why, or what, for the moment, he thought; he only felt the effect produced by the appearance of the place. Not

a soul was to be seen; the shutters were up in the drawing-room, and the library, though open, had the furniture partially covered over, as if the room were about to undergo a thorough turn out, or was partially packed up. He dismounted, and left his horse a moment, whilst he ran up the marble steps and rang the bell. Some minutes elapsed before any one came; at last a woman-servant appeared, and curtseyed, but she only opened the door sufficiently to show herself.

"Is not Mr. Thorpe at home?" asked Cyril.

"No, sir; he isn't."

"And Miss Thorpe?"

He asked the question with a sinking heart: the truth was slowly bursting on him.

"Law, no, sir! She 's gone along with Mr. Thorpe."

"And—and is there no one else in the house but yourself?"

"Oh, yes; my 'usband be here with me."

"Thank you: good afternoon."

And Treherne, passing the bridle over his arm, walked slowly down the carriage road. As he was passing the stable-yard gates he thought he heard voices within; so he looked and saw old Mansell brushing away at the

ponies. A sudden hope sprang up. Perhaps they had only gone to London; and the stable establishment would follow.

"Well, Mansell," called out Treherne, trying to speak cheerfully. "I have come home to find an empty house here: how is this?"

Mansell looked up shyly. He, like his betters and inferiors, had heard the report of Mr. Treherne's conduct; and as Miss Thorpe was a species of goddess in his eyes, he was not sure how to meet the friendly tone of one who was supposed to have injured her. Yet he liked Mr. Treherne for himself; he liked him because he was a first-rate horseman, and that, in Mansell's eyes, was being very nearly a perfect man. Then he had always received a kind word from him, and more than once a liberal tip; so that, on the whole, Mansell was divided in his opinion as to which was the proper way to meet him. At last he said, not in a very friendly tone,—

"Yes, sir; the house is empty. I am surprised you did not know it." And he laid a stress on the "you."

"How could I? I arrived only yesterday at home, and, owing to an unforeseen circumstance, I could not get here till now."

"I wonder you wasn't told," said the old

man, more kindly. "I think you should have been."

"I think so too, Mansell. I see all the servants are sent away. You remain here, of course, or—do you go with the horses to town?" This was asked on the chance.

"To town, sir,—what for?"

"Why, I thought perhaps Mr. Thorpe would have his horses and carriages up."

"Bless you, sir, he 's not in town, sir! They 've gone to some horrible unpronounceable place in Germany. I know it 's in Germany, and the Germany that is farthest off."

"Oh, indeed!" Cyril could say no more: those two words were difficult enough to get out.

"They started this morning. I did hear something about Major Kingsford getting some appointment, and their all going together. Ah, poor dear Miss Thorpe! She wasn't home till nigh upon twelve o'clock last night, and yet she was up at six, and in here with me, telling me to take care of her Peri, and to look well after the other horses; and her owl—the ugly brute! the first thing it did was to run its ugly beak into me."

Mansell went on chattering, rubbing down one of the ponies the while, and hissing between each sentence, either for his own or perhaps

the pony's amusement, not heeding Cyril; at last he looked up, and was struck by the look of extreme pain and the terrible pallor that was over his face.

"You're ill, sir, I'm sure! Can I get anything for you?"

"No, Mansell, thank you," said Treherne, rousing himself out of a sort of stupor. "I am not ill. I'll go now."

"Wait a bit, sir. You're not fit to ride like that. I wonder," thought Mansell to himself, "if he's sorry. Well, if he is, he can easily put it right, I'll wager; for that poor dear young lady was well-nigh heart-broken at going."

"I'm all right; I can ride well enough. Good-bye." And Cyril slipped a sovereign into the man's hand, as he held the horse whilst he mounted.

Mansell watched him as far as he could, and then he turned back again to his work.

"If he'd be come yesterday, maybe he'd be gone back with a lighter heart. Those gentlefolks are always too late."

Not till he reached the Yardley Woods did Cyril Treherne draw in rein; then he pulled up, dismounted, fastened his horse to a tree under which there grew some good grass, took out his bit, and let him enjoy him. He threw

himself down, out of the reach of the horse's hind legs, and, covering his eyes with his hat, endeavoured, in the stillness and solitude of the spot, to realize his position.

It was a very hard one, and, he thought, a very cruel one; for he was rendered helpless; he could not defend himself. They had gone, and given him no chance of clearing away the stigma some evil tongues had cast on him. But after all it was not so much that which pained him now; it was more the simple fact that he and Willie were parted—the cause mattered not; the circumstance remained the same. And he had gone there full of wild, happy dreams of making everything smooth. He had pictured to himself her bright blue eyes looking up into his, with the old faith and love—of her lips touching his—of her arms clinging round his neck, and of their mutual delight in having had the intense pleasure of removing the cloud that had for a time overshadowed her, but that he had not even been conscious of. And now the cloud had gathered over him, and darkness surrounded him; and he loved Willie with a deepness and intenseness he had never known before. It was not in reality that he loved her more, but that her being thus snatched from him,

when he thought he was about to fold her to his heart and claim her as his own openly and avowedly, had made him aware of how immovably she was entwined round his heart.

He felt certain she had not acted thus of her own free will. He was sure other influence, he knew not of, had been at work to damage him in her eyes; yet, what was he to do? To whom could he turn? He knew no one who had her confidence; and if he did, how would that help him. To follow her would be sheer folly, just at present. Perhaps she would not see him. She must learn the truth before he dare venture to see her. Yet, did she not know the truth? Could she have been by poor Cherry's death-bed so long, and not have heard it? Then why, if so, had she not written to him recalling her letter? And now flashed across his mind the worst and darkest phase of all: she, perhaps, was glad of the excuse—glad to accept a mere gossiping report to break off all further communication with him. If that were so, then indeed must he make up his mind, in spite of all, to root up his own deep, all-absorbing love. And yet, when he pictured that Hebe face—that face that, if ever truth were stamped on one, was stamped on it—that open, honest, loving, trustful face—

he cast from him with indignation the thought that she would stoop to anything so mean as an excuse. He knew her well enough to feel certain she would frankly and straightforwardly avow she had ceased to love him. She would not write a letter that would be hypocritical, every word of it, if she did not love him as truly, as sincerely, as she did when they parted. And he drew a long breath of relief, when reason and justice reasserted its sway over him. There is always hope, when you are sure of affection and honesty of purpose.

Yet Cyril's ride home was a very wretched one. Worn in body and mind, harassed with reproachful thoughts, whenever the dead face of Cherry Mason rose up before him, and which, in spite of himself, it constantly did; and then the cold, desolate gnawing aching at his heart, when Willie's sweet and loving face overshadowed the other, sorrowing and in tears for his supposed wrongdoing, and he without power to bring back the sunshine and happiness that it would take but a few words to recall.

It was a miserable time, and he could see no break in the dark sky to give hope of a brighter morrow.

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